

# **An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995**

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, awarded by De Montfort University

Research funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative  
Doctoral Award, in collaboration with the World Rugby Museum

Submitted September 2017

This thesis is dedicated to Lynne and Steve Hall, and to Sophie Herdman.

I couldn't have done it without you.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is the first oral history study of English rugby union. Through personally conducted interviews, it focuses on the experiences of men who played rugby union for England in the post-war, amateur era, and considers what they can tell us about both the sport and the society of which it was a part.

The period it covers begins with the end of the Second World War, in 1945, and ends when rugby union ceased to be an amateur sport, in 1995. These fifty years were a time of both change and continuity, and it is a primary concern of this thesis to consider the extent of each in both rugby union and in wider society. Through looking at, in particular, English rugby union's links with education, its relationship with work in a period in which its players were amateur, and its place on the spectrum of class, this study demonstrates, above all, the durability of rugby union's social core, even in the midst of outward change to the sport.

In doing so, it makes an important contribution to the historiography of both British sport and post-war Britain more generally, arguing for consideration of social continuity among a field largely dominated by notions of change. It also constitutes a unique study of a particular group of middle-class men, and demonstrates that sport – and oral history – can add much to our understanding of post-war social history.

## Acknowledgements

When I saw, in the summer of 2013, that De Montfort University was looking for someone to take on a PhD project entitled ‘An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995’ – and thanks should go to both my dad and to Mike Hobbiss for alerting me to that – I could not believe that someone had conceived an academic project quite so up my street. Thank you first of all, therefore, to Tony Collins and to Mike Rowe at the World Rugby Museum for doing so, and for choosing me to carry it out. Thank you also to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Rugby Football Union for helping to fund it.

Tony has been a fantastic supervisor. He has offered intellectual guidance and personal support in equal measure and, importantly, has been a friendly and approachable counsellor from the beginning. I could not have hoped for more, and this work owes a huge debt to him. At the World Rugby Museum, Mike Rowe, Richard Steele and Phil McGowan have all been hugely supportive, always willing to help and playing a crucial part in this research coming to fruition. At De Montfort University, Neil Carter not only stepped in as second supervisor for the final year of the research but also provided sound guidance and friendly support throughout. Dave Dee and Martin Polley were particularly supportive during my time teaching, and Victoria Dawson was a kind and helpful ‘evil twin’, as she would put it.

This study exists because of the willingness of several ex-rugby union players, often along with their families, to give up their time and share their experiences. I will be forever grateful to them for doing so and for providing me not just with the material to write this thesis but with a set of cherished experiences. Thank you to all of them. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the memories of Phil Judd, Ted Woodward, Don Rutherford and

Chris Winn, who have all sadly passed away since I visited them. I am particularly grateful to have had the chance to hear their stories.

It's impossible to imagine getting through a PhD without your friends and family being there to support you in different ways. Thank you to Toby Davies, John Gibbons, Tim Grady, Mike Hobbiss and Matt Roberts – you have all helped me in ways you're aware of as well as ways you're probably not. To Sue Herdman and Ian Pike, thank you not only for your editors' eyes but for your wise counsel and encouragement throughout.

To Soph – you once said that the idea of me finishing my PhD nearly made you cry with happiness, and I don't think that was because you were particularly enraptured by its conclusions. It's an impossible task to put into words how much having you by my side has helped me and meant to me – always has and always will. Thank you. I honestly will clean the bathroom now.

To Amy, thank you for listening to me, encouraging me and always being a kind and positive presence. You are everything anyone could hope for in a big sister. To Mum and Dad, there is no way to properly express all that you've given to me and done for me, not just in the context of this work but over the course of my life. All that I can say is thank you for all of it, from the very bottom of my heart.

## Abbreviations

FA	Football Association
FIFA	<i>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</i>
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
ICI	Imperial Chemical Industries
IRB	International Rugby Board
LAC	Leading Aircraftman
LEA	Local Education Authority
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAOC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
RFU	Rugby Football Union
SARFU	South African Rugby Football Union
UAU	Universities Athletic Union
UGB	United Glass Bottle Manufacturers
WOSB	War Office Selection Board
WRU	Welsh Rugby Union



# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Aims and historiography

I went to the grammar school at High Wycombe for an interview, and the headmaster asked me why did I want to come to the Royal Grammar School, and I said, ‘sport, sir’.

Ted Woodward, interview, 7 May 2014.

‘History’, wrote Raphael Samuel, is ‘very largely concerned with problematics of its own making ... Social history is quite different.’ The latter, as he saw it, ‘touches on, and arguably helps to focus, major issues of public debate ... It mobilises popular enthusiasm and engages popular passions.’<sup>1</sup> In England, as elsewhere, sport can lay a strong claim to be chief among the latter. It is a topic that touches on the lives of large swathes of the population, whether they take part in it, watch it or read about it. For some – for many, even – it is a guiding influence on their lives. It is a subject, therefore, fully deserving of the attention of social history; though it is one which has often been ignored.

The broad concern of this thesis is not with ‘problematics of its own making’, as Samuel put it, but with bringing existing ‘issues of ... debate’ and research into sharper ‘focus’, and engaging with a particular ‘popular passion’ – the sport of rugby union. More

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<sup>1</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘What Is Social History?’, *History Today*, March 1985, 34.

specifically, it aims to contribute to our existing knowledge of the sport in England in the post-war period – and to our knowledge of the social history of that period – through an analysis of the experiences of a particular group of people: men who played rugby union for England between 1945 and 1995. In doing so, it hopes to add to a growing body of research on the social history of both rugby union and sport in general in post-war Britain – while also contributing to the social history of post-war England first-hand evidence, and attendant analysis, of a group of people largely unstudied in such a context.

The first-hand evidence around which this study has been built is a collection of personally conducted oral history interviews with former England rugby union internationals. That collection, alongside this thesis, represents the first such study of English rugby union. Its period of focus can be labelled as the ‘post-war amateur era’ of the sport. It takes the end of the Second World War as its start date and ends in August 1995, when rugby union’s amateur status was abolished. Those interviewed all played at least once for England during this period (or, more specifically, between January 1947 and August 1995, as the former date was the point at which official international matches resumed following the war).<sup>2</sup> This period therefore allows a concentrated study of English rugby union and its players in a specifically post-war context. The fifty years after the war were a time of both change and continuity, both for the sport and the society it formed a part of. What can the experiences of players tell us about English rugby union in this time? How much, or how little, did it change? How are these trends linked to post-war English society in general? These are the chief questions this study aims to address.

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<sup>2</sup> England did play a number of matches between 1945 and 1947, but they were not considered to be truly representative (and therefore official) international matches. Players were not awarded ‘caps’ – the mark of an official international appearance – for playing in them. All ex-players interviewed for this study are ‘capped’ players – though Micky Steele-Bodger also played in three unofficial internationals in 1946.

To begin with the final question, this thesis seeks to situate the sport and, particularly, its players within the context of the society in which they operated. As Martin Polley has written, ‘Sport is not passive: it co-exists with its society, and, for post-war Britain, is an important component of that society.’<sup>3</sup> The post-war period in Britain has generally been viewed by historians as a time of change. Indeed, Anthony Seldon has written that ‘Britain changed more in the fifty years from 1945 to 1995 than in any other fifty-year period’, listing such examples as the rise of the welfare state, the decline of empire, economic change, the increasing role of technology in people’s lives, the changing position of women and the development of a multiracial society.<sup>4</sup> Such changes are covered by a number of histories of the period, such as Kenneth O. Morgan’s *The People’s Peace*, Brian Harrison’s *Seeking a Role* and *Finding a Role?*, Paul Addison’s *No Turning Back* and Arthur Marwick’s *British Society Since 1945*.<sup>5</sup> These works and others – such as those of David Kynaston and Dominic Sandbrook – also recognise, however, the importance of social continuities in the post-war period, particularly in the area of class.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard, for example, even go as far as to state that ‘modern Britain is as much the product of social continuity as it is of social change’.<sup>7</sup> This tension between change and

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Polley, *Moving the Goalposts: A History of Sport and Society Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1998), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Seldon, ‘Ideas Are Not Enough’, in *The Ideas That Shaped Post-War Britain*, ed. Anthony Seldon and David Marquand (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 257.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain Since 1945: The People’s Peace*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951-1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009); Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom, 1970-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010); Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> See David Kynaston’s ‘Tales of a New Jerusalem’ series, encompassing *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008); *Family Britain, 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); and *Modernity Britain, 1957-62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For Sandbrook’s work see, in particular, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006); *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London: Allen Lane, 2010); and *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard, *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain’s Classless Society* (London: Penguin, 1998), 28.

continuity is also evident in English rugby union, and thus forms a running thread through this thesis.

Post-war British history tends to be thought of in decades, and much of the significant recent literature has indeed been decade-specific (this ‘fashion ... for slicing up history into ten-year periods’ being labelled as ‘decade-ism’ by Ian Jack in his review of one such book, Andy Beckett’s *When the Lights Went Out*).<sup>8</sup> The aforementioned works by David Kynaston and Dominic Sandbrook broadly follow this approach, while other notable works that do so are Peter Hennessy’s *Never Again* and *Having It So Good*, Alwyn Turner’s trio of volumes on the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and Graham Stewart’s comprehensive *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s*.<sup>9</sup> While it should be borne in mind that exercises in this specific form of periodisation have the potential to parcel up the history of the period into artificially neat chunks, their approach is often more subtle and is useful for helping to chart change and continuity across the period. As such, this study has engaged with such an approach in positing its own periodisation specific to rugby union, the specifics of which are covered below in the section on ‘Thesis structure’.

There are three areas of post-war social history that are particularly pertinent to this thesis: education, class and work. As such, they have formed a defined part of its structure (again, this is considered in more detail below). Class, to deal with this aspect first, is, to quote David Cannadine, ‘one of the most important aspects of modern British history no less than of modern British life’.<sup>10</sup> It is, however, notoriously difficult to define, particularly

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Jack, ‘Downhill from Here’, *London Review of Books* 31, no. 16 (27 August 2009): 7–10; Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992); Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum Press, 2008); Alwyn W. Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* (London: Aurum Press, 2010); Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum Press, 2013); Graham Stewart, *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000), 16.

in the case of the middle classes, on which this thesis will largely focus. Cannadine himself articulates three models: ‘the hierarchical view of society as a seamless web; the triadic version with upper, middle and lower collective groups; and the dichotomous, adversarial picture, where society is sundered between “us” and “them”.’<sup>11</sup> He argues that all three have been, and still are, used as methods of ‘British social description’; elements of each are used in this thesis and indeed highlighted by the social history of rugby union in post-war England, typifying the way in which a common ‘language of class’ has developed from these models.<sup>12</sup> Looking specifically at the middle classes, Gunn and Bell acknowledge the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of a strict definition, but note the combination of ‘objective’ factors such as occupation and education and ‘subjective’, popular conceptions of the phrase as a ‘loose term of social description.’ ‘Being “middle-class”’, they write, ‘is evidently more than just a matter of schooling, job or where you live; it entails a whole cluster of attributes and attitudes’.<sup>13</sup> Not only did English rugby union’s participants largely fit objective models of the middle class, this study will show, but the sport also formed part of this subjective ‘cluster of attributes’.

Class, indeed, is an inescapably important part of the history of English rugby union. Beginning as it did in the public schools of Victorian England, rugby football started life as a socially exclusive sport. After beginning to find popularity among a more working-class audience in the north of England, it was claimed anew by its middle-class creators through the formal enforcement of amateurism from 1886 and, significantly, through the 1895 split over payments to players which saw the formation of the Northern Union

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19–20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* (London: Phoenix, 2003), 5.

(which, in time, became the separate and professional code of rugby league).<sup>14</sup> The extent to which rugby union retained its class homogeneity in the post-war era – a time in which the sport became gradually less amateur and in which the continued influence of class in society as a whole is a pertinent theme – is therefore an important topic of this thesis. As such, it is informed by the secondary literature on class in post-war Britain; as well as the thought-provoking framework provided by David Cannadine's *Class in Britain*, mentioned above, this includes the previously mentioned work of Marwick and Kynaston. It also includes the work of Anthony Sampson, and Adonis and Pollard (in *A Class Act*), in taking snapshots of class and power in Britain at certain times across the period. The aforementioned Gunn and Bell's *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* and Lawrence James' *The Middle Class: A History* provide comprehensive histories of specifically the middle classes, though across a longer period than that covered by this thesis; both largely exclude sport, though James does briefly consider it (and rugby union specifically) as an expression of middle-class values in late-Victorian and Edwardian England.<sup>15</sup> Harold Perkin's *The Rise of Professional Society* also considers the place of class in modern England. Perkin hypothesises the latter as, in principle, a society 'in which people find their place according to trained expertise and the service they provide', though one in which the 'horizontal solidarities of class' remained influential.<sup>16</sup> This theoretical framework is a particularly interesting one in which to consider rugby union; a sport whose place on the amateur-professional spectrum owed much to the issue of class.

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<sup>14</sup> These events are covered in detail by Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*; Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962); Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain Today* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965); Anthony Sampson, *New Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971); Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*; Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*; Lawrence James, *The Middle Class: A History* (London: Little, Brown, 2006); *Ibid.*, 333–34.

<sup>16</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 359.

Rugby union, it will be argued, had a particularly deep bond to education in this period. Thus, it is important to situate consideration of this theme within the context of Britain's educational system. Both secondary and higher education expanded significantly in this period, and both systems experienced a great deal of change. Brian Simon's *Education and the Social Order* and Ken Jones' *Education in Britain* provide detailed overviews of these changes, while on the extent to which the expanded educational system created a greater level of social mobility, Halsey, Heath and Ridge's 1980 study, *Origins and Destinations*, remains a valuable source.<sup>17</sup> Given its status as an amateur sport, the social context of rugby union is also particularly connected to work. Such themes as rugby helping to 'open doors' in the world of work (acting, indeed as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'social capital'; an exclusive currency provided to members of a social network 'which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word'), the ways in which rugby players' jobs reflected changes in middle-class work and the occupational culture of rugby itself have thus been considered in this thesis.<sup>18</sup> With regards to broader studies of work in twentieth-century Britain, such works as Crafts, Gazeley and Newell's *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain* and Arthur McIvor's *Working Lives* provide excellent overviews, but lack a particular focus on middle-class work which is the type of most importance to this study. Gunn and Bell's *Middle Classes* is more illuminating in this area, particularly in its coverage of the intensification of middle-class work in the latter part of the period.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); Ken Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); A. H. Halsey, A. F. Heath, and J. M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class, and Education in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alan R. Sadovnik (New York: Routledge, 2007), 88.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, and Andrew Newell, eds., *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*.

As Smith and Porter have recognised, sport has gained increasing recognition from social historians in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Mentions of it appear in the pages of many of the accounts above, while Ross McKibbin devoted a chapter to sport in *Classes and Cultures*, his study of English society between 1914 and 1951.<sup>21</sup> In terms of post-war history, David Kynaston perhaps makes more reference to the social context of sport than most other historians (and indeed occasionally refers to the social make-up of rugby union – noting in *Modernity Britain*, for example, the prevalence of privately schooled players in the England team).<sup>22</sup> Peter Hennessy reflected this growing appreciation of the importance of sport in history when he wrote that ‘Sport is immensely important to any serious attempt to reconstruct a nation’s collective life in any period since the mid-to-late nineteenth century’.<sup>23</sup> Despite this progress, though, it remains rare to see any concerted study – as opposed to mention of a more fleeting nature – of the importance of sport in social histories of post-war Britain, particularly so with regards to rugby union.

Such progress as has been made owes much to the development of sports history as a field in its own right. The history of sport in Britain has been well served by general histories, such as Richard Holt’s *Sport and the British*, Holt and Mason’s *Sport in Britain 1945-2000* and Martin Polley’s *Moving the Goalposts*. Each provides a picture of the prominent trends in the development of sport in Britain, focusing on themes such as amateurism, class and national identity, as well as the increasing commercialisation of sport in the post-war period. The theme of amateurism and professionalism in sport is also well served by two works in particular: Porter and Smith’s *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport*

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<sup>20</sup> Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter, eds., *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), vii-viii.

<sup>21</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapter Nine.

<sup>22</sup> Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 543.

<sup>23</sup> Hennessy, *Having It So Good*, 88.



and Porter and Wagg's *Amateurism in British Sport*. These works provide an informative set of case studies on the influence of amateurism on British sport, and the increasing tension between it and professionalism – in particular, Adrian Smith's chapter on the professionalisation of rugby union in 1995 (in *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport*) provides detailed information on the events immediately before and after that event, and a balanced contemporary assessment of the perceived positive and negative effects of commercialisation on the sport.<sup>24</sup>

Just as general social histories can only devote so much space to sport, however, such general sports histories can only do so to a particular sport. Rugby union is covered to a certain extent in the works above (and in particular by Gareth Williams' chapter on the history of the sport in Tony Mason's *Sport in Britain: A Social History*), but it is the work of a small number of other historians and sociologists which has developed the specific historiography of the sport. Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard's *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, which first appeared in 1979, is a landmark, in-depth study of the development of rugby football from a sociological perspective. While the second edition of the book includes an afterword covering developments in the 1980s and 1990s, the bulk of the work is concerned with earlier periods in the development of rugby. *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* is of undoubted use to historians of rugby, but remains first and foremost a work of sociology rather than of social history. Hence the work is rigidly analytical, and lacks voices

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Richard Holt and Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain, 1945-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*; Smith and Porter, *Amateurs and Professionals*; Dilwyn Porter and Stephen Wagg, eds., *Amateurism in British Sport: It Matters Not Who Won or Lost?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Adrian Smith, 'Civil War in England: The Clubs, the RFU, and the Impact of Professionalism on Rugby Union, 1995-99', in *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport*, ed. Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

from the sport as well as, given when it was published, a focus on the post-war societal context in which rugby union developed into a professional sport.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, Dunning and Sheard's important work paved the way for further academic work on the history of rugby football. David Smith and Gareth Williams' book on Welsh rugby, *Fields of Praise*, provided a model for a rigorous, nation-specific history of the sport, while Huw Richards' *A Game for Hooligans* was the first work of the professional era to tell a global history of rugby union from inception to its modern form. The history of rugby football – particularly in England – has been best served in recent years, however, by the work of Tony Collins. His work has argued for the place, particularly, of class in analysis of the development of rugby – the idea that 'class ... was the fulcrum around which rugby turned' in its more formative years and, as he argues in *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, that it remained an influential force in the sport even into the professional era. The latter work, published in 2009, represented the first truly socio-historical analysis of English rugby union from birth to professionalism, organised thematically to cover what Collins saw as the dominant concepts in the sport's development (education, amateurism, war, masculinity, class, playing the game, the empire and money). It is therefore a highly relevant work for this thesis.<sup>26</sup>

Collins' book argues that 'Rugby football came into existence as a way of transmitting the values and mores of the English middle classes through play,' and that, even into the professional era, 'rugby's inner social meaning ... endured.'<sup>27</sup> The latter half

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<sup>25</sup> Gareth Williams, 'Rugby Union', in *Sport in Britain: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> David Smith and Gareth Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union 1881-1981* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980); Huw Richards, *A Game for Hooligans: The History of Rugby Union*, revised (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2007); Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, xiv; Tony Collins, *A Social History of English Rugby Union* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 213–15.

of that argument is at the heart of the analysis provided by this study, which seeks to investigate the extent of change and continuity in the sport's social core. Where this thesis particularly differs from the work of Collins, and of Dunning and Sheard, is that, firstly, its analysis focuses specifically on the post-war period, and secondly – and most importantly – it is rooted in the first-hand experiences of those who played the sport. The first of these two bases derives partly from the second – conducting an oral history study requires living participants to interview. As mentioned above, however, it also derives from the fact that the post-war period in England is particularly fertile ground for social history, with a strong body of secondary literature and a narrative of change and continuity of its own. So, while this thesis asks what the experiences of rugby union players tell us about the extent of change and continuity within the sport in the post-war period, it also asks how their experiences can offer insight into the wider history of English society in that time.

The chief method by which this study aims to chart these experiences is that of oral history. In Britain, following the pioneering work of those, such as George Ewart Evans and Raphael Samuel, concerned with 'recording the experiences of so-called "ordinary" working people' in the 1950s and 1960s, oral history has widened to include all manner of recorded histories and subject matter. Labour history, communities, family lives and war have all been subjects particularly well served by it.<sup>28</sup> Within the genre, however, sport has largely been under-represented. Fiona Skillen and Carol Osborne, for example, wrote in 2015 that 'sport has not received much explicit attention from the oral history community', noting that, aside from a special issue on sport in 1997, *Oral History* – the journal of the UK-based Oral History Society – had only included six articles on the subject of sport or

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 2. For subject-specific discussion of the leading oral history work of recent decades, see Chapter Six of Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

leisure between 1972 and 2013.<sup>29</sup> *Oral History*'s special issue on sport acknowledged this gap itself, with the editors writing of a 'dearth of oral historical research' in the field of sport; while twenty years later, sport and leisure are barely mentioned at all in the latest edition of Paul Thompson's otherwise all-encompassing oral history text, *The Voice of the Past*.<sup>30</sup>

There has, however, been an increasing amount of work conducted in the field of British sports oral history in recent years. Rogan Taylor and Andrew Ward's *Kicking and Screaming: An Oral History of Football in England*, published in the mid-1990s, is among the largest in scale of such works, while Stephen Kelly has produced a number of works based on the oral testimony of fans, players and staff at both Manchester United and Liverpool football clubs.<sup>31</sup> More recently, Stacey Pope has studied the sociology of female sports fandom through oral testimony, while Robert Light's *No Sand Dunes in Featherstone* is based on the extensive testimony produced by the University of Huddersfield's *Up and Under* oral history project, which examined rugby league in West Yorkshire. Rachel Cutler's *Oral History of British Athletics* is also a large collection, including fifty-three in-depth interviews with former British athletes.<sup>32</sup> In terms of Irish sport, meanwhile, Boston College's GAA Oral History Project was a vast undertaking which aimed to capture the 'views, opinions and memories' of people involved in GAA sports at all levels. It aimed to be 'the largest public history project carried out' in Ireland – thousands of hours of interviews were

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<sup>29</sup> Fiona Skillen and Carol Osborne, 'It's Good to Talk: Oral History, Sports History and Heritage', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1889.

<sup>30</sup> *Oral History* 25, no. 1 (1997); Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

<sup>31</sup> Rogan Taylor and Andrew Ward, *Kicking and Screaming: An Oral History of Football in England* (London: Robson, 1996). Two examples of Kelly's work are *The Kop: Liverpool's Twelfth Man*, 3rd ed. (London: Virgin, 2008); and *Red Voices: An Oral History of Manchester United* (London: Headline, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Light, ed., *No Sand Dunes in Featherstone: Memories of West Yorkshire Rugby League* (London: London League Publications, 2010); Rachel Cutler, *An Oral History of British Athletics*, 1996, British Library Sound Archive. For Pope's work, see for example: Stacey Pope, "'There Are Some Daft People Out There!': Exploring Female Sport and Media Fandoms", *Sport in Society* 17, no. 2 (2014).

recorded both in Ireland and abroad, and outputs included Cronin, Duncan and Rouse's *The GAA: A People's History* and *The GAA: County by County*.<sup>33</sup>

Among all this, Stephen Kelly suggested in 2009 that 'there still remains considerable scope for the study of sports other than football' in the field of sports oral history.<sup>34</sup> While this gap has begun to be filled, oral histories of rugby union have, until very recently, remained almost totally absent from the field. There has been a series of popular releases based around international teams during the past few years, which provide interesting first-person accounts of action on the pitch, as well as some stories and experiences away from it.<sup>35</sup> These works, however, make 'no attempt to interpret the oral evidence but simply present it in a popular form', as Stephen Kelly wrote of his own book, *The Kop*.<sup>36</sup> This is true not just of these oral histories of rugby union, but of many other sports oral histories too. With some exceptions – particularly the GAA Oral History Project – there is a notable dearth of historical analysis and interpretation in the field of sports oral history. While presenting oral evidence 'in a popular form' – that is, arranging the words of interviewees into an overall narrative and presenting them with little or no contextual analysis attached – has its merits, there is a distinct need for more rigorous historical interpretation of oral evidence in the field of sports history (and particularly in the case of rugby union). This thesis, therefore, has attempted to use the oral testimony at

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<sup>33</sup> 'Boston College', *Gaelic Athletic Association - Oral History Project*, accessed 2 August 2017, <https://www.bc.edu/centers/irish/gaahistory.html>; Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan, and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009); Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan, and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: County by County* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Stephen F. Kelly, 'An Oral History of Footballing Communities at Liverpool and Manchester United Football Clubs' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2009), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Jones and Nick Cain, *Behind the Rose: Playing Rugby for England* (Edinburgh: Arena Sport, 2014); Tom English, *No Borders: Playing Rugby for Ireland* (Edinburgh: Arena Sport, 2016); David Burns and Peter Burns, *Behind the Thistle: Playing Rugby for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010); Stephen Jones et al., *Behind the Lions: Playing Rugby for the British and Irish Lions* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2012); Tony Johnson and Lynn McConnell, *Behind the Silver Fern: Playing Rugby for New Zealand* (Edinburgh: Polaris, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Stephen F. Kelly, 'Tales from the Terraces: Sport as Oral History', in *Merseyside: Culture and Place* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 242.

its heart as a basis of evidence to be placed in a wider historical context, and from which to draw observations about the place of the sport in English society in the post-war period. It therefore offers a different approach to the limited number of popular rugby union oral histories that have gone before it, and to many of the oral histories of other sports, too.

## Methodology

This study is based on research carried out across a range of primary and secondary sources. As explored above, its major primary basis is oral evidence which, though it shares much with written evidence, comes with its own set of methodological considerations. It is therefore important to consider these with regards to this study, beginning with the body of interviewees and how they were selected. The only essential criterion for selection was that interviewees had to have been capped for the senior men's England rugby union team between 1947 (as mentioned above, the year of the first official post-war international matches) and the end of amateurism in August 1995. This provided an overall framework for the study. Aside from that, as great a range as possible within this framework was sought, with such criteria as birthplace, educational background, rugby clubs played for, number of England caps, period in which the player was capped, and career away from rugby under consideration. The aim of the study was to ensure that both a range of different types of *rugby union player* and, more broadly, a range of different types of *person* was interviewed. The first consideration particularly included a desire to speak not just to the most famous players, but also to those who had played fewer times for their country (one of the formative principles of modern oral history was to record the experiences of those otherwise absent from history – in the sense of a sport, this might mean those who are unlikely to have been interviewed in depth in the past, or have recorded their

experiences in an autobiography). The second consideration – to interview a range of different *people* – intended to ensure that, within the framework of the study, as full a snapshot as possible was taken of society in the period under consideration.

The example criteria listed above were used as guiding factors, as opposed to a rigid structure for selection – it was understood that a desire for balance must be combined with the practical restrictions of recruiting interviewees, in this case from a somewhat exclusive pool. Despite such restrictions, though, a satisfactory overall balance was maintained. In total, thirty people were interviewed (a list of interviewees with selected biographical information is included as Appendix One).<sup>37</sup> Of those, for example, eighteen attended private secondary schools (60 per cent), seven attended grammar schools (23 per cent) and six attended non-selective state schools (20 per cent).<sup>38</sup> These percentages reflect the overall hierarchy for England rugby union internationals between 1947 and 1995; of those whose educational background could be found, 49 per cent attended private schools, 33 per cent attended grammars and 20 per cent attended secondary moderns or comprehensives.<sup>39</sup> Looking at further indications of balance, in terms of representation across the time period being studied, nine of the interviewees played for England between 1947 and 1959, twelve played in the 1960s, eight in the 1970s and nine between 1980 and 1995; and with regards to the length of interviewees' England careers, the number of caps won by interviewees ranged from one to eighty-five, with the average number being twenty. Several different

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<sup>37</sup> All except two of these were interviewed face-to-face, with the interview recorded. The two exceptions were Richard Sharp, who preferred to answer questions in written form, and Tim Rodber, who was interviewed over the phone and declined a request for the interview to be recorded. Rodber did, however, approve for use in this thesis the notes and quotations taken from the interview.

<sup>38</sup> One interviewee, Roger Uttley, attended two different types of secondary school (moving from a secondary modern to a grammar in sixth form) – hence the total here adding up to thirty-one, rather than thirty.

<sup>39</sup> Given the importance of educational background for this study, a database was created of the secondary schools attended by England internationals in the period studied. This made use of existing information in secondary sources, as well as online research and information from interviews. A table containing figures from the database, as well as a list of sources used, is included as Appendix Two.

occupations are represented, the vast majority of which are professional or managerial in nature. The most common was teaching – ten of the thirty had been a teacher at some point in their careers. This reflects the striking prevalence of teachers in rugby union in the post-war era in particular.<sup>40</sup> The dearth of manual workers, or of those with what could be termed working-class jobs, in the England team in this era is also reflected by the body of interviewees – Phil Judd, who began his career as a pattern maker, and Ted Woodward, who began his as a butcher, are the only two who come close to being included in this category.<sup>41</sup>

Recruitment of interviewees was carried out in a ‘decade by decade’ manner. Interviews were arranged and then carried out first from among those who debuted for England between 1947 and 1959, then from those who debuted in the 1960s, and so on. While there was some overlap in this process, the staggered approach provided a necessary basic structure. The chronological ordering mainly reflected the fact that it was important to begin by contacting the oldest potential interviewees first. Many of those who played for England in the 1940s and 1950s have since passed away, and those who survive are often now in their mid-eighties or older. It was therefore important to speak to those men as early as possible, so as to encounter them in the best possible health.

Interviewees were contacted mainly via letter and follow-up telephone or email conversation, though for some, initial contact was also made via email. An information sheet describing the project and the potential involvement of interviewees was also sent as

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<sup>40</sup> Tony Collins’ employment statistics for England internationals show that between 1946 and 1995, even though England players were spread across 63 different job categories, 84 of the 351 players – 24 per cent – were teachers. Collins, *Social History*, 215–18.

<sup>41</sup> As skilled manual work, though, both jobs could perhaps more accurately be termed ‘lower middle class’. Furthermore, both men went on to run their own businesses while still playing rugby – Judd in engineering, and Woodward in sports equipment.



part of the initial contact.<sup>42</sup> The RFU's World Rugby Museum provided assistance in finding contact details for potential interviewees. Where recruitment proved more difficult than initially expected, however, was the receipt of positive replies. Such replies were more common among the older candidates, probably due to the fact that most had retired from work and therefore led less busy lives, and perhaps also due to a greater appreciation of the chance to speak about an aspect of their lives they recall fondly. A number of those contacted, however, did not reply, or proved difficult to arrange an interview with. This was especially the case among those who played in the 1980s and 1990s – the majority of those contacted did not respond. This may have been due to lack of time, lack of interest or perhaps a wariness of being interviewed that stems from greater exposure to the media and greater levels of fame. While, overall, such difficulties led to a smaller number of interviews being carried out than initially expected, it did not affect the overall balance of the interviewee pool and those interviews that were conducted produced more than sufficient evidence for the purposes of this study.

The interviews themselves were carried out in a semi-structured manner. Instead of rigid adherence to a set questionnaire, a core selection of areas of questioning was maintained. Those common to all interviewees were early life and family; education; club rugby; international rugby; working life; thoughts on amateurism and professionalism; retirement from rugby and involvement in the game afterwards; and overall thoughts on the nature of the sport, and how it has affected their lives. The interview method used was that of a focused 'life story'; each interview aimed to capture the subject's life through the lens of their involvement in rugby union. This method intended to find the correct balance between the interviewee's involvement in the sport and their wider life story – and,

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<sup>42</sup> This is included as part of Appendix Three.

crucially, to examine the interaction between the two. Interviews lasted between one and three hours and took place largely at the interviewees' homes, with the main consideration for venue being somewhere that was convenient and comfortable for the interviewee.<sup>43</sup>

As oral history grew in the second half of the twentieth century, critics responded by pointing out perceived flaws in the evidence it produced; fears that 'memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of both interviewer and interviewee, and by the influence of collective and retrospective versions of the past.'<sup>44</sup> Alice Hoffman, for example, has written that while oral historians seek to obtain complete representations of the past, 'It is unlikely ... that in any given interview the oral historian will be entirely successful in this venture'.<sup>45</sup> Put simply, it is unlikely that everything an interviewee says will be accurate. In this study, instances of known inaccuracy often related to sporting facts and dates. Micky Steele-Bodger, for example, recalled that he first played for the Barbarians in a match against the East Midlands in 1948; in fact, he played his first game two years earlier, against the same opposition.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Gary Pearce recalled that he had signed a professional contract to play for Nottingham in the 1997-98 season, when in fact it was for the 1996-97 season.<sup>47</sup> Such errors are to be expected, and occur in a number of the interviews produced by this study. Factual details like these, though, are widely recorded and therefore often easily verifiable.

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<sup>43</sup> The exceptions to this were Micky Steele-Bodger (interviewed at the East India Club, London); Ray French (Liverpool St Helens Rugby Club); Rory Underwood (Leicester Tigers' stadium and, for a second session, St Pancras train station); and David Caplan, Jonathan Webb, Victor Ubogu and John Mallett (all interviewed at their places of work).

<sup>44</sup> Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Alice Hoffman, 'Reliability and Validity in Oral History', in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 71.

<sup>46</sup> Micky Steele-Bodger, interview, 8 July 2014 and 16 July 2014; 'Archive - Barbarian FC', accessed 19 August 2015, <http://www.barbarianfc.co.uk/archive/>.

<sup>47</sup> Gary Pearce, interview, 12 October 2015; *Guardian*, 13 December 1996.

Other evidence produced by an interview can be harder to verify, however. How do we know ‘what we can believe when there is nothing to check it against’?<sup>48</sup> It is here that critical assertions around the subjective nature of oral history carry more weight. Patrick O’Farrell wrote of oral history as ‘image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity’.<sup>49</sup> The personal involvement of the interviewee in the events and stories they relate, as well as the fallibility of memory, is seen by such critics to taint the reliability of interviewees’ recollections as historical evidence. While most historians acknowledge the potential presence of such flaws, though, it is commonly accepted that oral history has ‘a proper place in the system of evidence, experience, and analysis that produces good history’, and that ‘properly used it can make an important contribution’.<sup>50</sup> In other words, oral evidence is, in many ways, like any other evidence that historians use. As Hoffman shrewdly points out, oral history ‘is no worse than written documents. Archives are replete with self-serving documents, with edited and doctored diaries and memoranda written “for the record”’.<sup>51</sup>

The same academic rigour applied to the assessment of written sources, therefore, must also be applied to oral sources. For this study, this involved, among other things, cross-checking facts and taking care to consider the internal consistency of individual interviews (and, in some cases, cross-checking between different interviews). Care was also taken to consider the presence of bias in interview testimony. For example, when interviewees talk of England team selectors doing their job poorly, it may be important to

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<sup>48</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 206.

<sup>49</sup> Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> William Moss, ‘Oral History: An Appreciation’, in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 93–94. For a full discussion of the role of the interviewer, see Valerie Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa”, *Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997).

<sup>51</sup> Hoffman, ‘Reliability and Validity’, 72.

consider whether that interviewee was dropped from the team at any point himself.

Similarly, on a broader scale, favourable comments about the nature of the sport as a whole, coming as they do from rugby players, must be examined critically – was rugby union, for example, really a sport with ‘no class distinction’, as more than one interviewee asserted, or do such comments indicate a degree of favourable bias towards the sport?<sup>52</sup>

While subjectivity can be damaging, however, it can also be helpful to historians. As Paul Thompson puts it in *The Voice of the Past*, ‘what people imagined happened, and also what they believe might have happened ... may be as crucial as what did happen’.<sup>53</sup> Alessandro Portelli, in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, goes as far as to state that subjectivity is in fact a unique virtue of oral evidence:

[T]he unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure is the speaker’s subjectivity. If the approach to research is broad and articulated enough, a cross-section of the subjectivity of a group or class may emerge. Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.<sup>54</sup>

To return to the previous example, therefore, while an interviewee’s claim that there were ‘no class distinctions’ in rugby union may not, under examination, prove to be accurate, it may nonetheless help to inform us about the self-image which rugby union and its players cultivated. In this sense, indeed, rugby players may act as what Alistair Thomson has

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<sup>52</sup> This issue is discussed in further detail in, particularly, Chapter Two.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 228.

<sup>54</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 50.

referred to as a ‘particular public’ group – one in which its members construct a shared ‘meaning and identity’ to make sense of their experiences.<sup>55</sup>

Two further factors which require particular consideration in this study are age and fame. A number of the interviewees were elderly – nine, for example, were in their eighties at the time of interview. Ability to recall details of the past varied between these interviewees, but difficulty usually centred around such facts as dates and names.<sup>56</sup> Age, however, did not have a uniform effect on memory. Recall among older interviewees, as indeed among younger ones, tended to depend on each interviewee’s character and on the areas of their life which they most valued. Thus, for example, while John Young – who played for England in the late 1950s and early 1960s – could talk in detail about many other aspects of the sport or about his life outside it, he could not recall how many caps he won for England or who his debut was against. Such details, it seemed, were less important to him than they were to others. As Thompson has suggested, ‘Reliability partly depends on whether the question interests an informant’. Indeed, on the subject of age in general Thompson goes further, suggesting that ‘interviewing older people raises no fundamental methodological issues that do not also apply to interviewing in general’.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from age, fame is another factor for methodological consideration. Every interviewee has experienced at least some level of fame in his life, thanks to representing his country at a popular sport. Levels of fame vary between interviewees – those who played in later years, for example, experienced much greater media exposure than those who played just after the war. Where fame may have a particular effect on oral testimony is

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<sup>55</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8-10.

<sup>56</sup> One interviewee, Don Rutherford, had particular difficulty with such information as he was suffering from Parkinson’s disease. To help him recall particular details his wife, Sue, sat in on the interview.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 205; *Ibid.*, 208.

when it has led to a familiarity with the process of being interviewed. To what extent do interviewees' memories 'become entangled with the legend of their lives'?<sup>58</sup> Those who were particularly familiar with recounting details of their lives did have a tendency to return to well-practised stories, sometimes repeating, for example, what had been written in an autobiography.<sup>59</sup> In general, though, interviewees expressed surprise at the depth and topics of the interviews, suggesting that, while they may have been used to telling familiar rugby stories about great matches and opponents, an oral history interview of the type conducted for this study was a more novel experience.<sup>60</sup> Avoiding the pitfalls of an interviewee entering a well-rehearsed 'interview mode' is also part of the role of the interviewer, who must try to recognise these instances and direct the interview accordingly.

In addition to interview material, this study also makes use of a number of other primary sources. English rugby union was well covered throughout the period by national broadsheet newspapers; *The Times* and the *Guardian*, both of which carried extensive rugby union coverage, were the two most frequently consulted for this study. Newspapers were of particular use in providing factual information on events referred to in the thesis, but were also a good source of contemporary quotations and thoughts on the sport. Autobiographies also form part of this study's source material. As Joanna Bornat has written, 'the personal account has become a totally pervasive form, as any quick check through the media will show'; this is what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to as 'the memoir boom'.<sup>61</sup> Within English rugby union, they became popular from the 1980s

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<sup>58</sup> Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> This was observed, for example, of David Duckham and Roger Uttley – both particularly well-known players.

<sup>60</sup> This was best demonstrated after the interview with Budge Rogers, a former England captain and record cap-holder. Once the recording had finished, he expressed his surprise that he had not been asked who his toughest opponent was – 'that's the one I usually get asked', he said.

<sup>61</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'Biographical Methods', in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods*, ed. Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, and Julia Brannen (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 344; Sidonie Smith and

onwards, as the sport became more commercialised and the market for players to capitalise on their fame became evident.<sup>62</sup> As Paul Thompson notes, ‘autobiography ... is often concerned with themes very similar to oral history’.<sup>63</sup> The subjectivity of the narrator, for example, is an issue common to both; perhaps in a more heightened sense with autobiography, given the absence of the moderating force of the interviewer. In some cases, an autobiography may have been ghostwritten – this is particularly common in sports autobiography – in which case another level of subjectivity is introduced that the researcher must consider. In such books, opinions or elaborations may not, though they are presented as such, come directly from the ‘author’ themselves. While autobiographies have been a useful source for this thesis, therefore, they have required ‘reading practices that engage the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical ... trajectory of the text.’<sup>64</sup> Finally with regards to primary source material, limited use has been made of the minutes of IRB meetings and RFU annual general meetings. As this is primarily an oral history study, these have not formed a significant part of the research for this study. The intention in consulting this evidence, therefore, was not to delve into the minutiae of the decisions made by rugby union’s authorities (many of which were documented publicly as it is), but rather to provide supporting evidence at relevant points in the thesis.

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Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), Chapter Five.

<sup>62</sup> This was a decision that carried particular consequences for a rugby union player. As will be explored later in this thesis, making money from writing an autobiography was deemed by the RFU and IRB to be in contravention of the sport’s amateur regulations, and meant the player was subsequently banned from involvement in the sport. A number of high-profile ex-international players received bans as a result of writing autobiographies once they had finished playing.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 124.

<sup>64</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 13.

## Thesis structure

This study is composed of three main chapters, covering consecutive time periods. Chapter Two considers 1945-59, Chapter Three looks at 1960-1979, while Chapter Four covers 1980-1995. This chronological approach serves two purposes. Firstly, an overarching theme of this study is the tension between change and continuity, both in rugby union and in post-war society. There is a story to be told about the interaction between them as the period moved on; a chronological approach allows this to be done most effectively. Secondly, it is helpful to view post-war English rugby union, and its place in society, in three broad phases – a ‘return to normality’ in the late 1940s and the 1950s, a period of ‘transition’ in the 1960s and 1970s, and a time of ‘change’ – in some senses – in the 1980s and early 1990s. While, like any such approach, there are overlaps and subtleties within this periodisation, it is, overall, borne out by the evidence. Furthermore, such a structure not only aids a broader understanding of the history of the sport and its players in this period, but it also enables interaction with the aforementioned ‘decade-ism’ of much of the social historiography of post-war Britain.

During the research for this study, three important themes came to the fore: education, class and work.<sup>65</sup> These themes encompass much of what was highlighted by the oral testimony and other evidence about rugby union’s place in post-war England. They have therefore been given a central place in the structure of this thesis, with each appearing as a sub-section in each of the three chapters. This structure is intended to provide clarity, consistency and ease of comparison across the breadth of the period being studied, while

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Work’ is interpreted as, loosely, having two threads – occupations away from rugby, and the playing of (and training for) rugby. For clarity, each sub-section has been labelled ‘Work and playing the game’. Playing rugby can in some senses be seen as a form of ‘work’ for those who played it seriously, and grouping the two together allows comparisons to be made between changing attitudes to performance within rugby and to work in the traditional sense.



also allowing for a level of thematic investigation within the overall chronological structure. While these are the three most prominent themes of the study, two sub-themes also appear with their own sections: national service is included as a section of Chapter Two, while Chapter Three includes a section on English rugby union's relationship with apartheid South Africa. Both of these were themes which particularly merited their own sections in the study, given their prominence within the oral testimony and their importance to the overall theme of rugby union's social position. They act as 'case studies' to highlight the broader trends discussed throughout.

Finally, a word on what this thesis does not cover. Through its focus on the England men's rugby union team, and its basis in the testimony of male players, the remit of this study does not include women's rugby union. For much of this period, the women's game was embryonic in nature, though women began to play the sport more seriously from the late 1970s onwards.<sup>66</sup> Since then, women's rugby in England has grown to the point where over 25,000 women and girls play regularly, and over 300 rugby clubs have women's teams.<sup>67</sup> The history of women's rugby is a subject, certainly, deserving of its own study.<sup>68</sup> It does not, however, form part of this one. In general, gender is not a major theme of this thesis, having not come to the fore in the oral testimony. It is investigated where relevant, but it was not thought that this study could make a major contribution to existing knowledge in this field. Manliness and masculinity in rugby union are particularly well covered by Tony Collins in *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, who devotes a chapter to

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<sup>66</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> 'Women's Rugby: England World Cup Win Boosts Female Participation', *BBC Sport*, accessed 9 August 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/37560447>.

<sup>68</sup> At the time of submission of this thesis, Lydia Furse – a student at the International Centre for Sports History and Culture at De Montfort University – has just begun work on a PhD study on the history of women's rugby union between 1880 and 2016.

the theme.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, two other themes which would warrant particular study – those of national identity and race – do not feature in particular depth here.

The absence of any great detail on these themes in the oral testimony, in fact, is illustrative in itself. The positions of each were, it seems, virtually constant within English rugby union in this period; the majority of its players were white, patriotic, and male. When interviewees were asked, for example, whether they felt patriotic playing for England, the answer was almost always a firm ‘yes’, after which the conversation tended not to develop much further. The subject was such a foregone conclusion in the minds of most interviewees – such a constant in their world – that it provided little scope for investigation. The fact that the racial composition of the England team was virtually never mentioned, even during discussions about English rugby and apartheid South Africa, indicates just how fixed the notion of an English rugby union player being white was for the vast majority of this era. Furthermore, with regards to gender, the fact that women tended only to appear indirectly in interview testimony in the supporting role of ‘wife’ helps to demonstrate how set the idea was that rugby union was a game played and run by men. In this sense, much as the subjectivity of oral evidence may be a unique virtue of it, that which goes unsaid in an oral history interview can sometimes also be of value.

As mentioned above, Paul Thompson suggests that ‘Reliability partly depends on whether the question interests an informant’.<sup>70</sup> At a more basic level, so too does the volume of evidence produced by the question. An interviewee may have little to say on a subject simply because it does not interest them, or because they do not see that the question provides any scope for discussion. On the latter point, of course, the view of the

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<sup>69</sup> Collins, *Social History*, Chapter Four.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 205.

interviewer may be at odds with that of the interviewee, but the former must appreciate that what seems to be an area for extended discussion from a researcher's point of view may not be so from that of the person being interviewed. This, indeed, raises an additional methodological question: how far should an interviewer go in pursuing subjects an interviewee feels they have little to offer on, or are not interested in speaking about? There is a balance to be achieved between probing for further comment and maintaining a rapport with the interviewee, the latter being essential for producing a comprehensive and informative interview. That is not to say that a researcher should never pursue subjects that an interviewee is not wholly interested in or comfortable with; but, as with any form of historical research, oral historians must accept the method's limitations where necessary and incorporate them into their analysis.

## Chapter Two

### Return to Normality: 1945-1959

#### Introduction

On 24 November 1945, exactly 200 days after the war in Europe had come to an end, England took on a side from New Zealand in a game of rugby union. The match took place at Twickenham and was, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, ‘the first big match at the headquarters of the Rugby [Football] Union for six and a half years.’<sup>1</sup> But this was not quite the sort of international rugby the famous stadium had been used to hosting prior to 1939. The England team was weakened by the war; it was, as described by *The Times*, ‘approximately the best fifteen players available to represent the Rugby [Football] Union’. The New Zealand team, though talented, was made up entirely of men from the New Zealand Army – they consequently chose to eschew the usual ‘All Blacks’ moniker, instead humbly labelling themselves the ‘Kiwis’. None of the players who took part were awarded international caps for the game.<sup>2</sup> Even in sport, the chaos and upheaval of the Second World War were still in evidence.

This, though, was the first time a representative England team had taken the field at Twickenham since the outbreak of conflict six years earlier. Rugby had continued to a certain extent during the war, but ‘international’ matches took place between services teams, rather than ‘official’ national sides. Perhaps the clearest indicator of the unofficial nature of these wartime games was that the RFU, usually so strict in their refusal to allow ‘professionals’ from rugby league to play their game, relaxed the rules to allow league stars

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<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24 November 1945.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1945.

to compete alongside their union counterparts. Thanks to the war, furthermore, Twickenham itself had not been used as a sporting venue for some time. The famous west car park, usually the reserve of well-to-do champagne swillers, had been converted into a coal dump, with other parts of the stadium transformed variously into fire service depositories, allotments and air-raid shelters.<sup>3</sup> Now though, with war in Europe over, it could return to its proper function. On that day in November, in front of more than 30,000 spectators, the England XV were beaten by eighteen points to three. No matter that they lost; no matter that the game was not of particularly high quality – wearing their familiar white shirts with the red rose, England were playing rugby union at Twickenham again.<sup>4</sup> Normality, however gradually, was beginning to return.

The extent to which English rugby union, and English society in general, experienced change beyond a return to pre-war norms in the immediate post-war years is the subject of this chapter. With regards to society more broadly, social historians of post-war Britain such as Arthur Marwick and David Kynaston have emphasised the extent to which, in the words of Marwick, ‘certain continuities of British society [were] re-established’ following the war.<sup>5</sup> Indeed Anthony Sampson, in *Anatomy of Britain* – his 1962 study of British society – wrote of a ‘long unchanging time, from 1939 to 1957, when Britain ... seemed insulated against change.’<sup>6</sup> Rugby union, on the conservative side of the societal spectrum, epitomised the endurance of pre-war values and societal constructs, and showed little will for change itself. While some elements of the game began to alter, any

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<sup>3</sup> Phil McGowan, *Twickenham: The Home of English Rugby* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014), 68.

<sup>4</sup> The match was described in *The Times* as failing ‘rather badly to reach the old standards.’ *The Times*, 26 November 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 18; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*.

<sup>6</sup> Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, 636.

real change was embryonic – it was still the game of the middle-class gentleman in England, and was happy to be so.

By 1947, a full-strength England side was once again competing in official international matches. Ten years later, they won a first post-war ‘grand slam’, beating all four of their opponents in 1957.<sup>7</sup> Those 1957 championship-winning England players, and their contemporaries across the country, were not quite caught up in a whirlwind of change, though; instead, they had settled back into a social routine that was largely the same as the one they had followed before the war. This chapter will look at several aspects of society in the immediate post-war period, considering the evidence provided by rugby generally, and those interviewed more specifically. In doing so, it will demonstrate how the sport and its players tended to reflect conservative values, and how it remained firmly, almost unshakeably, rooted among the middle classes. To begin with, the chapter will survey the education system in the immediate post-war years; its effects on society, and its links with the sport of rugby union.

## Education

When I first went to King Henry VIII I was absolutely determined not to play rugby ... I was soon disabused of that notion.

*Peter Rossborough, interview, 2 July 2015.*

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<sup>7</sup> In the context of the Five Nations (and, latterly, the Six Nations) championship, ‘grand slam’ refers to the achievement of winning every match in a single championship.

Peter Rossborough was capped seven times for England between 1971 and 1975, but rugby was not his first love. He had grown up a soccer player and fan, like so many other young boys across the country, but now there was a spanner in the works. He had passed the eleven-plus, and he was off to King Henry VIII in Coventry, a direct grant school.<sup>8</sup> There, as at so many other private and grammar schools, rugby union was the sport. Such schools were rugby union's historical heartlands; it had been created in Victorian public schools, and had largely replaced soccer as the main sport of private and grammar schools during the 'rush to rugby' in the inter-war years.<sup>9</sup> In the years after the Second World War, private and grammar schools continued to play a vital role in the functioning of rugby union in England, introducing boys like Rossborough to the game and consolidating its middle-class profile. In a newly classified system of secondary education, indeed, rugby union reflected the presence of class and social hierarchy.

With regards to education, the post-war period began in the midst of a great shifting point – the Butler Act of 1944. The Act made secondary education compulsory and free in Britain for the first time, and guaranteed schooling for all up to the age of fifteen. It also led to the creation of a tripartite system of secondary education, divided between grammar, secondary modern and technical schools. The system was intended to provide the right education for the right pupil: the academically minded, or those 'interested in learning for its own sake' would go to grammar schools; the scientifically minded, or those 'whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or

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<sup>8</sup> Direct grant schools were selective secondary schools that included both fee-paying and non-fee paying pupils. They received a grant from the state in exchange for providing a proportion of their places free of charge through their local education authority. This system was abolished in 1975, when direct grant schools were given the option of becoming independent or comprehensive. The majority chose the former. Direct grant schools are typically categorised in educational statistics as 'independent' or 'private', and thus have been categorised as such in this study.

<sup>9</sup> For further detail on the 'rush to rugby', see Collins, *Social History*, 65–68.

applied art' would go to technical schools; and the rest, described as those 'interested in things as they are', would go to secondary moderns. The intention was that each type of school 'should have such parity as amenities and conditions can bestow'; the prime objective of the reorganisation was to offer 'equivalence of opportunity to all children'. Indeed, as Butler later put it himself, 'I hoped to achieve what is called, in trite phrases, greater equality of opportunity'.<sup>10</sup>

The Norwood Report – the precursor to the Butler Act – suggested that 'parity of esteem must be won by the schools themselves'.<sup>11</sup> Butler's replacement in the Ministry of Education, Ellen Wilkinson, was keen to pursue this line, stating in 1946 – with a hint of acknowledgement of the potential for division in the new system – that the secondary modern schools were to be 'in no sense dumping grounds'.<sup>12</sup> Such well-meaning theory soon evaporated, though, to reveal a reality in which secondary moderns were the second tier of schooling, a level below the high-status, high-prestige grammars.<sup>13</sup> The latter, according to Keith Evans, were given 'favoured treatment ... by most LEAs'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as Gunn and Bell have stated, 'to have to go to a secondary modern rapidly became a label of failure'.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, the idea of differing levels of 'status' between types of school was evident in school rugby. When it came to fixture lists, geographical location played a large part –

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<sup>10</sup> Committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council, 'Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools' (London: HMSO, 1943), 2–3; Ibid., 14; Ibid., 24; Butler quoted in Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council, 'Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools', 24.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 150.

<sup>13</sup> Technical schools failed to make any significant impact on the educational landscape. A number did exist before 1944, but very little effort was made to expand them. As David Kynaston notes, by the late 1950s in England and Wales, there were 1,252 grammar schools, 5,493 secondary moderns, and only 267 technical schools. The tripartite system therefore essentially became bipartite. Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 616.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Evans, *The Development and Structure of the English School System* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 114.

<sup>15</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 167.



most schools tended to play those in nearby areas. Important too, though, was the position of the school in the educational hierarchy. With some exceptions, private schools played private schools, grammar schools played grammar schools, and the rest played the rest. This was probably due to a mixture of status-consciousness and a concern that fixtures should be relatively evenly matched – the rugby-playing strength of schools tended to run in parallel with the de facto educational hierarchy (private, followed by grammar, followed by secondary modern). Ian Beer, who won two caps for England in 1955 and was educated at the private Whitgift School in the late 1940s, recalled the relationship between his school and Whitgift Middle, its sister establishment (a direct grant school):

[T]he tradesfolk went to Whitgift Middle. It was the sons of professional men who went to Whitgift [School]. So of course we didn't play Whitgift Middle. That would have been 'not the form at all'. Awful!<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, John Young did not recall his Bishop Vesey's Grammar School team ever playing against a private school; and, mock-snobbishly, commented that they, in turn, 'didn't play the secondary moderns'.<sup>17</sup>

Although 'parity of esteem' quickly fell by the wayside, what the Butler Act did mean was that wealth was – in theory – no longer the only path to a prestigious education. Whatever the difference in status between grammar schools and secondary moderns, a grammar school education was now in reach of all children; as long as they could pass the dreaded eleven-plus exam. Peter Rossborough, mentioned earlier, was one of many future rugby union players who did so; a fact his primary school teacher evidently found surprising:

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Beer, interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>17</sup> John Young, interview, 22 January 2015.

She asked us on the day the results came out, ‘How many of you are going to Cheylesmore School?’ which was the local secondary modern, and about half the kids put their hand up. Then: ‘Who’s going to Whitley Abbey?’ which was the new comprehensive – the other half put their hands up. And then she said ‘Anybody left?’ and I put my hand up with another girl . . . And the teacher said ‘Where are you going Rossborough?’ and I said ‘I’m going to Henry VIII, Miss.’ And she said ‘Don’t you lie to me,’ like that. And I’ll remember that forever and ever and ever. They wouldn’t believe me until my mother came up to school and showed them the letter that I’d had to say that I was going there.<sup>18</sup>

Rossborough was from a working-class family; his father worked in various factories in Coventry, while his mother ‘spent most of her life doing part-time jobs.’<sup>19</sup> Grammar schools were seen as engines of social mobility for children like him, providing the hard-working and intelligent with an opportunity to ‘get on’, whatever their families’ means. In a BBC television programme named *Does Class Matter?* broadcast in 1958, for example, the High Master of Manchester Grammar school stated his belief that ‘the grammar schools are really the spearhead of the movement of social mobility’.<sup>20</sup>

Ray French, another former England international who won a place at the local grammar school (and later taught there), also believed that they were a force for good. French was brought up in what he described as ‘very much’ a ‘working class area’ of St Helens. His mother and father, like many others in a town that was at the heart of Britain’s glass industry, worked at the United Glass Bottle Manufacturers glassworks. He spoke fondly of his upbringing, describing living ‘within 500 yards of the St Helens Rugby League Club ground’ in a house full of relatives – his mother, his father, his grandparents and his

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Rossborough, interview, 2 July 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Eric James, quoted in Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 167.

aunt. After passing the eleven-plus, he became the first in his family to go to grammar school:

I was the first scholarship kid in the family, and it was like great pride, you had to wear your cap, and I remember my dad coming home with my cap from the shop, and my blazer and my badge. And walking down the road, and everybody looking, you know, ‘ooh, Ray’s going to Cowley’, and that sort of thing.

Though he admitted that he could ‘see how it was divisive in society, in a way’, French is ‘a great believer in the grammar school’ and was adamant about the positive effect that passing the eleven-plus, and attending Cowley School, had had on his life:

It certainly made me, there’s no question about it. It took me – I mean, I loved the environment I was in, and I stayed in that environment – but it took me to see another world. It taught me that, hang on a minute, I can go to university here, I can go to college here. You know, I don’t need to go sorting bottles out at UGB. I can do something. And I can play rugby.<sup>21</sup>

French did indeed go to college – Leeds University, to be precise – and went on to pursue a career in teaching and, later, broadcasting. He was introduced to the alien sport of rugby union at grammar school, a sport which he ‘didn’t know existed’ until the age of eleven.<sup>22</sup> He excelled and played four times for England in 1961, before returning to his first love and switching codes to pursue a successful career in rugby league.

Another interviewee who expressed such sentiments about the potential for social mobility provided by grammar schools in this period was Ted Woodward, an England

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<sup>21</sup> Ray French, interview, 15 October 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. In their study of working-class children and education in Huddersfield in the 1950s, Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden noted the desire of working-class boys at Marburton College (a grammar school) to play rugby league instead of soccer. Attempted compromises by the school to offer rugby union, said Jackson and Marsden, missed the point: ‘rugby union was almost as remote as lacrosse, and not what was wanted at all’. Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, Revised (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1966), 123.

winger of the 1950s. As the son of a butcher, he grew up in a council house, and found himself at the age of eleven with an opportunity to attend Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe. 'So I went to the grammar school', he said, 'and probably it was the best thing that I ever did in my life.' It was there that Woodward was introduced to rugby union, which he believes 'made [his] life' by allowing him, in his late twenties, to move away from the family butcher's shop and open a successful chain of sports shops.<sup>23</sup>

Such stories of the working-class grammar school boy or girl 'made good' abound, and there can be no doubt that, as they became free to all, grammar schools did have a profound effect on a number of young lives in the years following the war. The extent, however, to which the school system in England was able to provide real educational mobility in the 1940s and 1950s is disputed. It is true that, in terms of absolute numbers, more working-class children received a secondary education than had been the case before the war. In 1938-39, 15 per cent of children passed from elementary to secondary school; by 1950-51, that figure had increased to 22 per cent.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, though, there was little advancement on the part of the working classes in relative terms. As Ross McKibbin has observed, 'In most parts of the country the proportion of free places won by working-class children was no higher in 1950 than in 1914, and in some places lower'.<sup>25</sup> Looking specifically at grammar schools, A.H Halsey's study, published in 1980 and based on four ten-year birth cohorts ranging from 1913-22 to 1943-52, demonstrates the lack of ground made up by the working classes. Between those born 1913-22 (and thus schooled prior to the 1944 Act) and those born 1943-52 (starting secondary school between 1954 and 1963), attendance at grammar school increased by 9 per cent among the children of the service

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<sup>23</sup> Ted Woodward, interview, 7 May 2014.

<sup>24</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 260.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

class (the top two tiers of Halsey's class hierarchy) and by only 8 per cent among the working class.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, as Peter Hennessy has put it, 'For a working class child getting to grammar school was one thing; thriving there could be quite another.'<sup>27</sup> Those children of working-class families who did go to grammar school were less likely to stay on beyond school leaving age (or, beyond that, carry on to university) than their middle-class peers.<sup>28</sup> The middle classes, it appears, were 'the relative beneficiaries of the 1944 Act'.<sup>29</sup>

There was, then, an extent to which the education system in the immediate post-war period reinforced and even promoted the status of the middle classes. The experience of John Young, who played for England between 1958 and 1961, exemplifies this. Young described his father as 'an ambitious man', who, after fighting in the Second World War, moved his family to the West Midlands for the benefit of his insurance business. The Youngs moved into a comfortable home on a leafy Sutton Coldfield road, and John passed his eleven-plus with flying colours to win a place at the local grammar school, Bishop Vesey's. Of the school, and the pupils there, he said the following:

*JY:* I think they all thought of them – their parents all thought of them as, you know, middle-class clever boys. Which is what we were all taught to try and be.

*Interviewer:* That was the kind of ethos of the school was it?

*JY:* Yes it was rather. You know, you were good at sport, you were good at class; you went to a good university. You aimed at a top job when you were an adult.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Hennessy, *Having It So Good*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 263–64. Don Rutherford, interviewed for this study, was one such working-class child who left grammar school early. He left Tynemouth High School at the age of seventeen to take night classes for a secretarial qualification and to work at the local fish quay. He only later attended St Luke's College – a teacher training college – after he had been told about it, and encouraged to apply, by rugby teammates during national service. Don Rutherford, interview, 12 March 2015.

<sup>29</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 262.

<sup>30</sup> Young, interview.

A middle-class child, taught to be a middle-class child. There is an argument to say that for all the anecdotal evidence of social mobility, this was the major function of the grammar school in the post-war years. Certainly, whatever the composition of the intake, a grammar school education was about more than just good exam results. As Young intimates above, grammar schools aimed to create well-rounded young men and women: intelligent, morally decent, socially confident and prepared for success. They had, according to Gunn and Bell, ‘a determination to change their pupils’ social behaviour along with teaching them academically demanding subjects’, and aimed to equip their pupils with the skills and habits necessary to occupy a place in the middle classes.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, they followed the lead of the public schools. The difference in the post-war era was that middle-class parents who had previously had to pay for such an education for their children were now able to obtain one ‘instead by examination, and at no cost.’<sup>32</sup>

Sport – especially rugby union – was an important part of this socialisation process. Grammar schools, as Adrian Smith has put it, ‘extolled the virtues of rugby union’.<sup>33</sup> Rugby’s role in the grammar schools had roots in the gentlemanly athleticism of the Victorian public schools, where sport was seen as an important means of promoting character in young men and helping to teach them the moral principles, courage and competitiveness they would need as future leaders in the British Empire. The philosophy of Muscular Christianity – the promotion of Christian moral ideals through athleticism – became influential in public schools, and ‘gave British middle-class men of action at home and abroad a moral framework in which to justify their work.’<sup>34</sup> The perceived educational

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<sup>31</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 166.

<sup>32</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 262.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Smith, ‘Sport, Counterfactual History and Rugby’s Twin Codes’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 21, no. 1 (2004): 102.

<sup>34</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 7.

value of rugby was particularly seized upon after the First World War, when ‘its wartime record as a defender of Edwardian imperial ideals ... laid the basis for rugby’s ousting of soccer as the dominant sport in the public and grammar schools’ in what has been termed the ‘rush to rugby’.<sup>35</sup> Richard Holt believes that the philosophy of sport in the public schools of Victorian England ‘can be summed up in two words: fair play.’<sup>36</sup> This idea of healthy, fair competition and a strong sense of respect for one’s opposition remains a vital part of rugby union’s self-image, and it was this element of the game that made it so important to the all-round grammar school education. A handshake with your opposite number after your first game of rugger started you on the road to many more in the offices and clubhouses of adulthood. Rugby union was a significant cog in the grammar school machine; a machine which aimed to shape the raw material it selected into its image of an upstanding young adult.

Whatever the extent of the change brought about by free secondary school places, and whatever was said about parity of esteem between the different types of institution, there remained an elephant in the room: the private school. There had been recommendations in the Norwood Report that a quarter of private school places should go to pupils from the state system, but as it turned out, private schools went untouched by educational reform, remaining ‘sacrosanct against change’.<sup>37</sup> This was a fact ‘judged by many as a great lost opportunity’, according to Nicholas Timmins, and something that

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 65. The extent to which rugby union, and not soccer, became the accepted game in grammar schools is indicated by an episode pointed out by David Kirk in *Defining Physical Education*. The *Times Educational Supplement*, wrote Kirk, reported in 1950 of a boy at a Birmingham grammar school ‘who wanted to play soccer (not rugby) and to become a professional player ... [T]he school’s Headmaster was reportedly “appalled” that the boy should complete a grammar school education only to become a professional footballer.’ David Kirk, *Defining Physical Education: The Social Construction of a School Subject in Postwar Britain* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), 105.

<sup>36</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, 98.

<sup>37</sup> Morgan, *Britain Since 1945*, 19.

David Kynaston believes may have been down to the existence in Number 10 after 1945 of Clement Attlee, a proud Old Haileyburian.<sup>38</sup>

This sector of the English system continued as before, then, and its pupils, as Attlee had, continued to prosper. Rugby, as it had done from its origins onwards, continued to play a vital part in the ethos of private schools, and often formed part of the glittering CVs of private school alumni. Ian Beer, an England international in 1955, first played rugby union at the private Whitgift School, at a time when, according to F.H.G. Percy's history of the school, there was a renewed focus on sport following the privations of the war years.<sup>39</sup> From that institution, his path was a very successful one, both on and off the pitch: Cambridge, at which he was captain of rugby, followed by two England caps, a succession of high-profile headmaster posts (including Harrow) and, after retirement as a teacher, the presidency of the Rugby Football Union. Beer has stayed in touch throughout the course of his life with the large group of prefects over whom he presided as head boy at Whitgift. Their lives tell similar stories of success: 'one opened the batting for England, Raman Subba Row ... there are four CBEs now out of the twenty-seven; two professors,' said Beer.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, solely from the years 1947 to 1949, Percy adds further evidence of sporting success among Beer's contemporaries: 'an English Amateur Golf Champion and Walker Cup player (I. Caldwell), a British Chess Champion (L.W. Barden) and an Olympic rifleman (S.B.O. Cranmer).' There were also 'more than a dozen who became county rugby players.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 86; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 153.

<sup>39</sup> F.H.G. Percy, *History of Whitgift School* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), 311.

<sup>40</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Percy, *History of Whitgift*, 311.



The life of Micky Steele-Bodger, a former Rugby School pupil who won nine England caps (the first of which came in England's first official post-war international in 1947), is another played out at the highest level of English society. His father had been an eminent veterinary surgeon, and was President of the National Veterinary Medical Association from 1939 to 1941.<sup>42</sup> Micky himself received a bursarship to Rugby, before following his brother to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. The two brothers, like their father, became vets; Alisdair, indeed, went on to become president of the re-named British Veterinary Association. Micky, having captained Cambridge at rugby, became an England international. Following an early retirement from playing due to injury, he went on to hold a number of high-ranking posts in the game: among other positions, he has been chairman of selectors for the national side, President of the RFU and President of the Barbarian Football Club. Eighty-nine years old at the time of interview, he still held the latter post, as well as the presidency of the East India Club, an illustrious gentlemen's club in St James' Square. To top off a lifetime of prestige, he was awarded the CBE in 1990 for services to rugby football.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, not all those who attended private schools inevitably went on to live high-achieving lives, but such schools did give them a greater opportunity of doing so. Anthony Sampson, for example, observed that Britain in the immediate post-war years was still dominated by the 'old privileged values of aristocracy, public schools and Oxbridge'; that 'the old fabric of the British governing class' had kept its 'social and political hold'.<sup>44</sup> As Ross McKibbin points out, 'in 1954 65 per cent of those earning £1,000 or more had been to public school, and of those earning £1,000 or more with sons of school age, 95 per

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<sup>42</sup> 'Harry Steele-Bodger Biography', *British Veterinary Association*, accessed 1 May 2015, [https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/Membership\\_and\\_benefits/Students/hsb\\_biography.pdf](https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/Membership_and_benefits/Students/hsb_biography.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, 637–38.

cent were sending them to public schools.<sup>45</sup> The system could not hope to be truly meritocratic, or equal, while the private schools still existed in their separate sphere. Indeed, Keith Evans wrote that ‘the continued existence of the independent schools’ was one of the chief reasons why the Butler Act ‘failed to achieve the egalitarian ideal which inspired its passage’.<sup>46</sup> As David Kynaston writes of Britain as it moved into the 1960s, ‘Education was as ever a tangled picture, but the fundamental fact remained the twin, class-determined apartheid: between the private schools and the state schools, and, within the state system, between the grammar schools and the secondary moderns.’<sup>47</sup>

The evidence from higher education in this period, somewhat naturally, reflects that of secondary education, highlighting the relative success of middle-class children. As with secondary education, the overall number of students attending university gradually increased in this period. In England and Wales, full-time student intake at universities increased from 39,438 in 1937 to 70,405 in 1955, whereas across the UK the number of students obtaining their first degree rose from 9,311 in 1938 to 22,426 in 1960.<sup>48</sup> Students of working-class background were, it should be noted, part of this expansion. The aforementioned Halsey study shows that between the cohort reaching the age of eighteen between 1931 and 1940, and the cohort reaching eighteen between 1951 and 1960, university attendance by working-class students increased by 1 per cent.<sup>49</sup> Once more though, students from better-off families made the greater gains. In the same period, Halsey’s service class saw a substantially higher increase of 17 per cent.<sup>50</sup> Attendance at

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<sup>45</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *English School System*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 542–43.

<sup>48</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 141; Paul Bolton, ‘Education: Historical Statistics’ (London: House of Commons, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 188. Ray French was one such student, moving on from Cowley School to Leeds University in 1958 to study English, History, Latin and ‘Russian, would you believe it.’ French, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 180.

grammar or private school was more likely among the service class and, in turn, the path to university still overwhelmingly started at grammar or public school. Halsey et al. showed that, across the whole period covered by their data (the first cohort beginning with those born in 1913, and the fourth cohort ending with those born in 1952), 72 per cent of children of service class families attended selective secondary schools, whereas only 24 per cent of working-class children did so. Following that, an overwhelming 91 per cent of university students from Halsey's sample had attended either a private, direct grant or grammar school.<sup>51</sup> The education system in post-war England might therefore be summed up as one in which, in theory, a good education was free to all, but in reality, achievement and progression were weighted in favour of those from more prosperous backgrounds. As Halsey and his co-authors state, 'The familiar picture' is one in which 'the greatest absolute increments of opportunity go to the service class'.<sup>52</sup>

It was from private and grammar schools, as John Young put it above, that 'you went to a good university' and 'aimed at a top job when you were an adult.' Young himself, 'under pressure from [his] mother to go to a good university', won a place at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, to study law. He had a connection at the college: Peter Robbins, who had captained the rugby side at Young's school and was by now a 'Teddy Hall' man (Robbins would also go on to represent England, winning nineteen caps between 1956 and 1962). Robbins, said Young, 'put in the word for me'. From there, having survived the rigours of an interview during which, Young joked, he had put on a well-spoken accent and told the interviewing tutor that he had ambitions to go to the Bar ('I made it up as I was going along'), his progress was assured.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>52</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 188.

<sup>53</sup> Young, interview.

Oxford would prove to be the perfect showcase for Young's rugby talent.

University rugby was dominated in this era by Oxford and Cambridge. The annual Varsity match between the two remained, as it had been before the war, a fixture of true national importance, attracting extensive write-ups in the national press and often sell-out crowds at Twickenham. The fixture was so popular, in fact, that following the first post-war Varsity match in December 1945, the Oxford secretary approached Wembley stadium over a possible switch of venues – it could hold a larger crowd and could offer greater financial reward to the universities (the decision was made, in the end, to stick with Twickenham).<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Phillips, who played in four such games for Oxford between 1956 and 1959, pointed out that the Varsity match 'was almost a trial – an England trial – in some ways', recalling that in one Varsity match he 'played in [a] side which had seven full internationals'.<sup>55</sup> John Young believed that his first cap for England came 'through [his] involvement with Oxford against Cambridge ... rather than the games I played for Moseley in the vacations'.<sup>56</sup> Mike Smith, who won one England cap against Wales in 1956, also recalled that the Varsity match was 'always was a bit of an England trial'. Furthermore, he notes that it was common for Oxbridge students to be picked for England at the time:

December '55 was the Varsity match [Smith's second Varsity match] ... And [I] got capped in January '56 against Wales. Now in that England side there was myself, Peter Robbins and John Currie [who were all Oxford students] ... And from Cambridge, there was David Marques. Now, imagine today; the two second rows, Marques and Currie, come straight out of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ross McWhirter and Andrew Noble, *Centenary History of Oxford University Rugby Football Club* (Oxford: Oxford University Rugby Football Club, 1969), 166.

<sup>55</sup> Malcolm Phillips, interview, 30 April 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Mike Smith, interview, 4 June 2014.

Indeed, the aforementioned Malcolm Phillips won twelve of his twenty-five caps for England while a student at Oxford.<sup>58</sup>

As well as the Varsity match, the two universities had top-level fixture lists, playing the likes of ‘Cardiff, Harlequins, Newport, Northampton, Gloucester’.<sup>59</sup> They also played international touring sides; in the 1950s both universities played against South Africa, New Zealand and Australia (with both Oxford and Cambridge beating the latter on their 1958-59 tour). They did not, however, tend to play very often against other university teams at this time. The *Oxford University Handbook* stated their position on such fixtures in 1932:

In most sports Oxford and Cambridge have placed themselves upon a pinnacle from which there is at present little prospect that they will have to descend. London and the modern universities cannot yet hope to compete with the older universities on equal terms, and if they play Oxford at all, probably play one or other of the Colleges.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, by the amateur standards of the time, rugby was taken seriously at Oxford and Cambridge. Malcolm Phillips pointed out that, compared with club sides, his Oxford team ‘trained more, and we were fitter, no question’. This was due to the fact that the students ‘weren’t holding down nine till five jobs’ and had ‘got a bit of an advantage on age’. Although training was ‘all done by the captain’ and was ‘fairly simple by modern standards’, it was perhaps slightly more advanced at Oxford and Cambridge than elsewhere in the country.<sup>61</sup> From an outsider’s point of view, too, ‘Oxbridge were incredibly strong in those days’ – those being the words of Budge Rogers, who played with a number of

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<sup>58</sup> Stuart Farmer et al., *English Rugby Player by Player* (Swindon: Marks and Spencer, 2007), 162.

<sup>59</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in D.J. Wenden, ‘Sport’, in *The History of the University of Oxford Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 533.

<sup>61</sup> Phillips, interview.

Oxford and Cambridge students while an England player.<sup>62</sup> Ian Beer, a former Cambridge captain, recalled the following of Oxbridge rugby in the early 1950s:

We were really semi-professionals at Oxford and Cambridge. We thought about the game. We actually took cine-film of the game and analysed it which, you know, nobody ever did at that stage – didn't even do it at international level. I would invite the top international player to come and watch us play one game every time, then we'd take him out to dinner and we'd get him to analyse the game and so on. Then it all finished, and I went and played for the Harlequins, and I'd go in there and my opposite wing forward would say 'Do you want to play open or blind?' ... And I would think to myself, 'if you guys got a little bit better organised, you'd beat everybody.'<sup>63</sup>

Richard Sharp used similar terms to describe his time at Oxford between 1959 and 1961, commenting that in a 'non-financial sense' the Oxford team was 'professional', as they 'were able to train and practise a great deal.'<sup>64</sup>

The strength of rugby at Oxford and Cambridge partly reflected the fact that their intake came largely from private and grammar schools. Between 1946 and 1952, for example, 75 per cent of male arts undergraduates and 69 per cent of male science undergraduates at Oxford came from independent or direct grant schools.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in the case of John Young, entry to Oxford and Cambridge – as well as to other universities – was often assisted by the applicant's sporting prowess, and the social connections and connotations that came with it. Playing sport at grammar or private school – often rugby union specifically – imbued participants with what Pierre Bourdieu

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<sup>62</sup> Budge Rogers, interview, 14 July 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Sharp, letter, 22 September 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel I. Greenstein, 'The Junior Members, 1900-1990: A Profile', in *The History of the University of Oxford Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 53.

referred to as ‘social capital’; an exclusive currency provided to members of a social network ‘which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.’<sup>66</sup> ‘Credit’, in this sense, meant a greater chance of gaining entry to a prestigious institution of higher education.

D.J. Wenden, in his chapter on twentieth-century sport in *The History of the University of Oxford*, states that ‘from 1944 undergraduate places qualified for automatic state funding: tutors felt compelled to consider intellectual ability as the main criterion for admission.’<sup>67</sup> The experiences of those interviewed for this thesis suggest that the compulsion took a little longer to develop. John Young, for example, commented that his fame as a sprinter – he was a talented track athlete as well as a rugby player – helped him to win his place at Oxford; ‘by that time’, he said, ‘I’d won quite a lot of races at national level’. Malcolm Phillips, who went up to Trinity College, Oxford in 1956, said that the college knew he played rugby for Fylde and had played for the Rhine Army, and that rugby had ‘an influence’ on his admission. Mike Smith, educated as a boarder at Stamford School, attended St Edmund Hall, Oxford in the 1950s. He was able to ‘[get] an intro’ through the sports master at his school, Bill Packer, who had himself been at the college as a student and knew its principal. A talented rugby player and cricketer (he represented England at both sports), Smith believed that ‘the fact that it was a good sporting college was good news, as such’.<sup>68</sup> Ray French also benefited from the new grammar school ‘world’ that had been opened up to him by Cowley School, putting his place at Leeds University down to rugby, and the connections of his headmaster:

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<sup>66</sup> Bourdieu, ‘Forms of Capital’, 88.

<sup>67</sup> Wenden, ‘Sport’, 519–20.

<sup>68</sup> Young, interview; Phillips, interview; Smith, interview.

We had a headmaster, great man called Walter Wright. He'd been a prop forward himself, at Leeds University. He called me in one day, he said 'Raymond! What are you thinking of doing?' Well I said, 'I don't know sir, I'm thinking...' He said ... 'I think it'd be a good idea for you if you went playing for Leeds University'. He said, 'Now, I've put a phone call in' – [laughs] this is it, he wasn't bothered about what I bloody did – he said, 'I've put a phone call in', he said, 'and they could do with a second row ... Now, I want you to make an application to Leeds'. That was it. So I went to Leeds! Basically to play second row.<sup>69</sup>

The value of rugby prowess with regards to university entry was derived from the special place the sport occupied in a grammar or private school education. Rugby was important to such schools – it had, after all, been born in Victorian public schools, and grammar schools in the post-war period continued to be noteworthy for their desire to mimic their more prestigious counterparts. Indeed, David Kynaston notes that such mimicry often took place 'on the playing fields, where rugby tended to be the socially acceptable, officially endorsed winter sport'.<sup>70</sup> Ted Woodward notes that rugby was very important at Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, when he was a pupil in the 1940s – 'There was no soccer at the school, rugby was the game for the winter' – while Peter Rossborough is quoted earlier on the importance of rugby at King Henry VIII school in Coventry. Richard Sharp, an England international of the 1960s, commented that at Blundell's School in Devon – the private school he attended between 1952 and 1957 – 'it was compulsory for the whole school to watch the 1st XV home games.'<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, this period in particular saw a notable rise in grammar schools taking up rugby. Tony Collins highlights the evidence from an FA survey of 1958, which 'showed

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<sup>69</sup> French, interview.

<sup>70</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 568.

<sup>71</sup> Woodward, interview; Sharp, letter.



that twenty-three grammar schools had abandoned soccer for rugby union and another fifty-five had introduced rugby alongside soccer.<sup>72</sup> As a consequence of all this, the majority of England players in the period 1947 to 1959 were, unsurprisingly, from grammar school or private school backgrounds. Of the 133 players who made their debuts for England in this period, educational details could be found for 123. Of these, 29 per cent had attended a grammar school, and 60 per cent had attended a private school. Only thirteen players – 11 per cent – had attended a non-selective state school.<sup>73</sup> This is most striking when set against educational figures for the population as a whole. In 1950, 4.6 per cent of secondary school pupils in England and Wales were educated at private schools; by 1960, this had increased slightly to 5.3 per cent.<sup>74</sup> The contrast between these figures and the aforementioned 60 per cent of England rugby union internationals is stark. It demonstrates that achievement in the game, as perhaps in life outside it, was usually reserved in this period for those who had been educated at more prestigious institutions.

The role of schools in providing rugby union players in this period was vital. A great number of future players were first introduced to the game on the school playing fields, rather than through other means, and this was particularly true in an era when broadcast coverage of the game was minimal. Ted Woodward was a soccer player as a child, and had not touched an oval ball until he began to attend Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe. He found that ‘there was no soccer at school’, and that he was ‘made to play rugby’; something that he ‘hated’ at first but soon grew to love and excel at. John Pullin enjoyed trips to watch local soccer teams Bristol Rovers and Bristol City as a child, and was unaware of rugby until he reached the local grammar school – ‘that was the first

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<sup>72</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 104.

<sup>73</sup> For a fuller set of figures on the schools attended by England internationals, and the sources consulted in arriving at those figures, see Appendix Two.

<sup>74</sup> Bolton, ‘Education’, 17.

time we'd ever heard about it'. Ian Beer, too, played his first ever game of rugby as an eleven-year-old at secondary school (the private Whitgift School in his case). Ray French, from a somewhat different world to Beer, had grown up playing and watching rugby league; as mentioned earlier, he 'didn't even know rugby union existed' until a confusing first encounter with the alternative code during his first games lesson at Cowley School. He described arriving home from that lesson and being asked by his dad if he enjoyed it; 'Yeah', he said, 'but we don't play rugby, we play – it's different.' These first encounters with rugby union at grammar or private school were typical stories for boys of the era. Those, like David Duckham, for whom the sport became more than just a schoolboy hobby, often remain thankful: 'I have to thank the grammar school for giving me the opportunity to play a sport I never thought I would be good at.'<sup>75</sup>

While private and grammar schools were the heartlands of rugby union, the sport was not exclusive to them. Consider the experience of Phil Judd, who captained England in the 1960s. He recalled the sport he played at school in the late 1940s:

We used to play touch rugby in the playground, and you'd get probably fifty-a-side playing touch rugby. Football was never allowed in the school at all. If you were seen kicking a football, that was sacrilege ... [T]he headmaster was mad on rugby.

On the face of it, a typical scene from any grammar or private school of the era – it even brings to mind the formative days of the sport at Rugby School itself. In this case, though, the school is Broad Street School, which was, as Judd described it, 'just an ordinary secondary modern school'. It was clearly one, though, at which rugby, and not soccer, held sway. In fact, Judd described rugby as being more important 'than the Bible' during his

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<sup>75</sup> Woodward, interview; John Pullin, interview, 10 June 2015; Beer, interview; French, interview; David Duckham, interview, 18 March 2015.

time at Broad Street. The key here, perhaps, was both the location – Coventry, a rugby union hotbed and home to one of the country’s foremost club sides – and the influence of a ‘rugby-mad’ headmaster.<sup>76</sup>

The experience of Peter Ford tells a similar story. Though he left Central School, a secondary modern school in Gloucester, at the age of thirteen, he played rugby for the school team during his time there. The sport was certainly taken seriously at Central School – to the extent that in 1945, Ford was involved in a game against the second XV of a local adult side, Gordon League, which the young schoolboys somewhat predictably lost ‘by about seventy-something points’.<sup>77</sup> Again, the location of the school no doubt helps to explain the prominence of rugby there – like Coventry, Gloucester was, and still is, an outlying English town in which rugby union enjoyed cross-class support.<sup>78</sup>

So, while it was more likely in this period that one would encounter rugby union at a grammar or private school than at a secondary modern, it was not the case that the sport was entirely restricted to the ‘higher status’ schools. Indeed, in the following decade, the growth of comprehensive schooling would see an unlikely increase in the amount of rugby being played at non-selective schools. In the 1949-50 season though, there were 137 private and 55 grammar schools affiliated to the RFU – and only six state schools.<sup>79</sup> This statistic alone demonstrates that in the immediate post-war years, rugby union remained the sport of the selective schools. As a result, the majority of rugby players continued to be educated

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<sup>76</sup> Phil Judd, interview, 12 February 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Peter Ford, interview, 25 February 2015.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the place of rugby union in the history of Coventry, and a brief comparison with Gloucester, see Adrian Smith, ‘An Oval Ball and a Broken City: Coventry, Its People and Its Rugby Team’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 11, no. 3 (December 1994): 506–15.

<sup>79</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 219.

at private and grammar schools. Given the lack of real change in the dominance of the middle classes at such schools, the sport remained rooted in that section of society.

## Class

‘I suppose there was a predominance ... of middle class’.

*Malcolm Phillips, interview.*

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, originally published in 1941, George Orwell famously described England as ‘the most class-ridden country under the sun.’<sup>80</sup> There is, though, a different story of class in the immediate post-war years. Thrown together by the upheavals of the Second World War, it goes, Britons emerged from their finest hour with a newfound appreciation of those both above and below them on the social ladder. ‘There was much talk of the war “breaking down” the social structure, “levelling” or “mixing” social classes, and creating class unity’, Arthur Marwick has written; as Churchill put it in 1940, ‘There is no change which is more marked in our country than the continual and rapid effacement of class differences’.<sup>81</sup> Britain also emerged from the war with a Labour government, who set about restructuring the country along more egalitarian lines. As the economy began to grow, and as young men from across the land continued to serve with each other thanks to national service, austerity began to evaporate and the fruits of recovery began to trickle

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<sup>80</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962 [1941]), 27.

<sup>81</sup> Arthur Marwick, ‘Class’, in *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000*, ed. Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 81; Churchill quoted in Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 146.

down to Britons across the social spectrum. By the end of the 1950s, from factory worker to factory owner, ‘most of our people’ had ‘never had it so good’.<sup>82</sup>

While there are elements of truth in this version of events, the reality was more complex, and not quite so hopeful. Marwick believed that such ‘talk’ as described in the above quotation was ‘hyperbole’, whereas Kenneth Morgan has commented that ‘the belief that the British class system dissolved or was basically modified during the war is a total myth’.<sup>83</sup> Class remained a prominent part of English life; as Paul Addison has put it, ‘consciousness of social gradations seems to have survived “the people’s war” with very little modification.’<sup>84</sup> This was epitomised by the school system described earlier in this chapter. The major change that was, in fact, in progress was the expansion of the middle class. This had begun in the late nineteenth century, and, aided by the rise of employment opportunities within both science and technology and the public sector, the middle class continued to grow in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1931, 30 per cent of the British workforce worked in non-manual jobs; this figure had increased to 36 per cent by 1951.<sup>85</sup>

While the middle classes swelled in number, class distinctions remained. As David Kynaston puts it, this growing section of the population was ‘in some ways best defined as “not working class” in terms of attitudes, assumptions and self-image’. Kynaston records the testimonies of certain Mass Observation interviewees, who saw themselves as middle class because of, variously, their ‘prosperity’, their ‘University’ or ‘Grammar school education’, the ‘semi-suburban’ location of their home, or even the fact that their curtains

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<sup>82</sup> Harold Macmillan, speech at Bedford, 20 July 1957, quoted in *The Times*, 22 July 1957.

<sup>83</sup> Marwick, ‘Class’, 81; Morgan, *Britain Since 1945*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Addison, *No Turning Back*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb, eds., *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 288.

were not ‘torn’ and ‘dirty’.<sup>86</sup> Although rugby union’s own self-image was one of classlessness – as will be explored below – the sport, rather than cutting across social gradation, slotted neatly into it. Rugby formed a cherished part of the culture of a growing number of middle-class men. In a nation increasingly dominated by an expanding middle class, the sport remained firmly situated in its pre-war position in the class hierarchy – it was a middle-class sport, and at this time, there were few signs of that changing. The evidence provided by the sport, and its players, therefore helps to illuminate the middle classes in this period, and demonstrates the extent to which England remained a ‘class-ridden’ society.

When it comes to surveying class and rugby in this period, England’s network of clubs is an informative place in which to begin. Harlequins, based in Twickenham, were one of England’s foremost clubs in this era (and remain so today). The club, according to both those who played for it and those who played against it, was the archetypal upper-middle-class institution, attracting a large number of university (usually Oxbridge) graduates and professionals. In the words of Phil Judd, ‘they were all professional people’, while Ted Woodward recalled that ‘all the university people, after they finished Oxford or Cambridge, went to the Quins’.<sup>87</sup> One such person was Ian Beer, who said of the club: ‘It was full of Oxbridge Blues, and internationals, and chaps with bowler hats and rolled umbrellas; the joke was, “Here come the gentlemen of the Harlequins”’.<sup>88</sup>

The picture painted of this particular rugby club is clear, and it comes as no real surprise that a London rugby club in the 1940s and 1950s was made up mainly of middle-class professionals. What is more revealing about these comments, and the general image

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<sup>86</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 144.

<sup>87</sup> Judd, interview; Woodward, interview.

<sup>88</sup> Beer, interview.

of Harlequins within the sport at that time, is what it tells us about social gradations *within* the sport. Even in a predominantly middle-class sport like rugby union, such gradation existed to the extent that a club like Harlequins was known for attracting a certain ‘type’ of middle-class person. Taking two examples from opposite ends of the spectrum – as far as is possible in a relatively socially homogenous sport – Phil Judd recalled the difference as he saw it between his club, Coventry, and Harlequins:

For example if you played the Quins, right, they were – I’m not being derogatory here, but they’d be ex-universities; they were doctors, they were lawyers; solicitors; they were all professional people. Right? But the Coventry kids, we all worked on the shop floor – we all got our hands dirty. And there’s nothing wrong in that, and there was nothing wrong with the Quins.

As Judd acknowledged himself, to say that *all* the Coventry players worked ‘on the shop floor’ is an exaggeration – but certainly, here was a club with a contrasting class profile to that of Harlequins. As Judd put it, ‘you didn’t get many professional people playing the game in Coventry.’ Judd himself was an engineering pattern maker by trade, following in the footsteps of his father.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Bert Godwin, the England international hooker alongside whom Judd played much of his Coventry rugby, was employed as a toolmaker at the Massey Ferguson works in the city.<sup>90</sup> Judd listed more members of the Coventry forward pack he played in:

Georgie Grace – he was a miner. Right? And then you’d get Ray Batstone. He worked at Coventry Gauge and Tool, he was a toolmaker. And then you’d get Wilf

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<sup>89</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Brendan Gallagher, ‘About Rugby: Godwin Dies at 70’, *The Telegraph*, accessed 9 April 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/columnists/brendangallagher/2330896/About-Rugby-Godwin-dies-at-70.html>.

Graham, played number eight. And he worked at Courtauld's [a fabric and chemical manufacturer], in there. And then you'd get Johnny Gardiner – he was a plumber.<sup>91</sup>

The composition of Coventry's team reflected its status at the time as a major centre of industry, with many players working in manual jobs within local manufacturing companies. The city, as Adrian Smith has written, had developed prior to the Second World War as a particularly 'close-knit' community, where 'work and play still focused strongly on the city centre'.<sup>92</sup> The city's sportsmen were thus often the city's workers. Over time, indeed, Coventry had developed 'an unusual concentration of ... skilled workers ... trained fitters, mechanics, lathe-operators, and the like'.<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that many of the Coventry players working in factory jobs were part of this skilled workforce, sitting towards the more affluent end of the working-class spectrum. Even in a manufacturing city like Coventry, rugby union still rarely recruited from the bottom of the class hierarchy. (To Phil Judd, none of this really mattered – what was most important was that 'they were all bloody great forwards'.)<sup>94</sup> In fact, whereas a number of Coventry's players worked on the factory floor, Judd's fellow prop, George Turnbull, ran a factory – or at least part of one. In 1956, he was made divisional manager of car production at Standard Motors in Coventry, and would go on to receive a knighthood after a string of illustrious positions in the motor industry.<sup>95</sup>

At Harlequins, just as at Coventry, not everyone could be placed in the same class category – the overall sense, though, was of a firmly middle-class institution. Tom Danby,

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<sup>91</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, 'An Oval Ball and a Broken City', 507–8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>94</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Wood, 'Obituary: Sir George Turnbull', *Independent*, accessed 14 August 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-sir-george-turnbull-1565339.html>.



the son of a Durham quarryman who played for Harlequins and England in the late 1940s, recalled:

I always felt that I wasn't really one of them. Because I come from a very humble background, and I suppose in those days, as a boy, I used to feel it, very much actually ... when I was at school you came across this quite a lot. But I was accepted by the Quins, and nothing like that was ever remarked, but I always felt just a little bit – not on edge – but – well I wasn't one of the gang.

Even though Danby had been privately educated thanks to a scholarship at Barnard Castle School (where he first played rugby), it still seems that, in social and class terms, he was a fish out of water at Harlequins. There is a sense here of that familiar class concept, the so-called 'natural order of things' – despite the presence of the supposedly unifying factor of sport, Danby was simply not 'one of the gang'. After receiving an England cap in 1949, he switched the following season to rugby league, signing for Salford and going on to play for Great Britain. Though he did not state it directly during the interview, there was a sense that this switch of codes may have had something to do with his feeling out of place at Harlequins. Certainly, his glowing assessment of his fellow players at Salford, and of the Salford fans ('they were a lovely crowd'), made it clear that he was much more comfortable once he had moved. Not so happy about the situation was Harlequins doyen Adrian Stoop, a towering figure of the English rugby union establishment. He wrote a letter to Danby, which, otherwise 'charming', summed up the young winger's move in the following disapproving words: 'Eve tempted and Adam did eat.'<sup>96</sup>

Moving away from the clubs and to the national team, the influence of class and hierarchy within English rugby was reflected by its governing body, the Rugby Football

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<sup>96</sup> Tom Danby, interview, 30 April 2014.

Union. The RFU had been the sport's founding association, forming in 1871 to formally codify a fledgling game that had, from its origins on the playing fields of Rugby School, developed a growing band of devoted adult players and clubs. The Union's first president, Algernon Rutter, was, naturally, an Old Rugbeian – as was his secretary, Edwin Ash, along with Rutter's first four successors.<sup>97</sup> While the line of Rugbeians was broken in 1882, the class profile of RFU presidents remained largely the same over the next fifty years or so. On the whole, they were privately educated, professional men. A brief glance at the biographies of early presidents reveals a multitude of terms which point towards their backgrounds: Oxford, Cambridge, Marlborough, Haileybury, Freemason, company director, solicitor, golf, rowing. These were men of the finest amateur breeding.<sup>98</sup>

Had any of this changed by 1945, seventy-four years on from the foundation of the RFU? The Union's first post-war president was John Daniell. He had been educated at Clifton College and Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he had won rugby and cricket Blues in each of his three years as a student. From there, he had captained Richmond and England at rugby, and had served as an England selector from 1913 to 1939. He had also captained Somerset at cricket, as well as acting as a selector for the national team in that sport. In among all of this, he had been a master at Stanmore Park Preparatory School, as well as having business interests in tea planting in India. It is safe to say that the election of 'The Prophet', as he was known, did not herald any radical post-war change in the social class of the leadership of English rugby.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Richards, *Hooligans*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> U.A. Titley and Ross McWhirter, *Centenary History of the Rugby Football Union* (London: Redwood Press, 1970), 218-228.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

Those in charge of English rugby in the 1940s and 1950s were, as they had been before the war, largely men from private school backgrounds, a number of whom were Oxbridge alumni (in that sense, they reflected the fact that, more broadly, management in the UK across the twentieth century was, as David Coates has observed, ‘still heavily and disproportionately drawn from upper-middle-class circles and Oxbridge’).<sup>100</sup> Seven of the fifteen presidents from 1945 to 1960 held an OBE, CBE or knighthood. They had served the game well – first as players (just over a third of them capped by England), and then as administrators, combining positions on club, county and RFU committees with jobs like ‘Director of Colliery Companies’, ‘stockbroker’ and ‘specialist in ear, nose and throat’.<sup>101</sup> They had worked their way up through the necessary hierarchy, and once they had served their year-long term, were replaced with another man who had done the same. The RFU at this time was run by those who had always run it.

Another significant component of the administration of the sport was the RFU’s body of selectors, responsible for picking the national team. They were led by a chairman, who was appointed by the RFU and who in turn appointed his own team of selectors. This system remained in place until the late 1980s, reflecting the amateur unease with placing too much power in the hands of a national manager or coach – in professional football, for example, the FA disbanded their international selection committee in 1962 and placed responsibility for selection in the hands of the national team manager, Alf Ramsey.<sup>102</sup> English rugby union’s selectors were described by interviewees who played in this period as anything from ‘a nice bunch’ to ‘aloof’, although one thing about them was certain – when

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<sup>100</sup> David Coates, *The Question of UK Decline: State, Society and Economy* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 140.

<sup>101</sup> Titley and McWhirter, *Centenary History of the Rugby Football Union*, 222–23. The jobs referred to belonged to, respectively: Harry Cleaver, President of the RFU 1951–52; Colonel Bernard Hartley, President of the RFU 1947–48; and Leonard Brown, President of the RFU 1948–49.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008), 286.

it came to deciding who reached the highest level of the sport in England, they held the power.

To Ted Woodward, in fact, ‘they were like God’. John Collins, who played three times for England in 1952, summed up the relationship between the players and the selectors by saying ‘we didn’t really hear anything about them’. While they would occasionally ‘come up and have a game of snooker and that’, Collins said, there did not tend to be too much interaction between the two groups. Malcolm Phillips, who went on to be a selector himself, recalled the relationship between England players and selectors in the late 1950s:

I suppose when I first [started playing] ... we called them ‘sir’. But when you’d been round a while it got a bit looser. But no, I think there was a good rapport with the selectors by and large. And they used to muck in, you know, we’d have a few drinks together. But at the end of the day they did the picking and we did the playing.

John Young – another future selector – took a favourable view of the England selectors. To him, they were ‘fair and honest’, and ‘examples to the players’. He saw those at the RFU in general as ‘basically quite nice people. “Decent chaps” was the expression you used to use.’ (Despite this admiration, he laughingly admitted that the players still enjoyed a joke at the expense of those in power now and again: ‘It didn’t stop us calling Mr X or Mr Y a “bloody old bastard”’.)<sup>103</sup>

Whether the players had positive or negative views of the selectors, it was clear that the latter were the senior, more powerful group. They were to be respected, called ‘sir’, and their decisions were to be adhered to. The existence of this body of senior men was

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<sup>103</sup> Woodward, interview; John Collins, interview, 14 May 2014; Phillips, interview; Young, interview.

indicative of more than the simple fact that someone had to pick the team. They were the archetypal ‘alickadoos’ – a piece of rugby terminology that refers to committee men, or the ‘blazerati’. They had progressed through the system, they had served their time and acquired the necessary expertise, and now took their rightful place at the top of the tree. This system mirrored, to a certain extent, the idea of the classic public school hierarchy, with the chairman of selectors as head boy and his fellow selectors as prefects. It also echoed the often hierarchical and paternal nature of other British institutions. David Coates, for example, notes the ‘persistence ... of values of paternalism’ in twentieth-century British industry, and the fact that the UK ‘is possessed of an intensely class-conscious managerial and owning stratum’.<sup>104</sup> David Kynaston, too, has observed that ‘there still prevailed in Britain circa 1950 a considerable amount of what over half a century later seems like very old-fashioned paternalism’, referring to ‘often historically very entrenched attitudes on the part of employers and management’.<sup>105</sup> In the banks of the City of London for instance, just as at Twickenham, ‘the manager was always known as “sir”’.<sup>106</sup>

It could be argued that the selectors bring to mind, in one sense, Harold Perkin’s theorised ‘professional society’; a society in which those in positions of responsibility were ‘selected by merit and ... trained expertise’. After all, they had almost always played the sport to the highest level themselves, and were therefore well qualified to pick the national side. On the other hand, though, England selectors in this period were chosen solely by the chairman, and tended to hail from the upper echelons of society. Micky Steele-Bodger, educated at Rugby School and Cambridge, became a selector in 1953 at the invitation of the chairman, Carston Catcheside OBE, a former British Army officer educated at Oundle

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<sup>104</sup> Coates, *The Question of UK Decline*, 149.

<sup>105</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 412.

<sup>106</sup> Lawrie Penny, former employee of Lloyds Bank, quoted in Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 196.

School. As such it was clear that rugby union, like Perkin's England, contained 'horizontal solidarities of class' which 'cut across' the 'professional hierarchies'.<sup>107</sup>

Rugby union in this period, then, reflected in many senses the layered society of which it formed a part. What of the idea, though, of the 'classless' nature of sport – the pitch, the changing rooms and the clubhouse as places where background, education and occupation were all forgotten? It is a theme that many of those interviewed were keen to pick up. Ian Beer, who as well as playing for Harlequins went on to play for Bath, felt that one of the reasons rugby 'was so good' was that the sport 'overrode' any perceived social differences among its participants. For Beer, rugby provided an escape from the hierarchical professional world he inhabited in his daily life as a public school headmaster; an escape from the lonely world of being 'the boss'. 'I went to the rugger, and they said "Piss off Ian",' he laughed. 'All these rugby people treated you as the man you are, period. It didn't matter what you did or who you were.' He stated firmly that he could not 'recall any class distinction within the clubs [he] played for.' Peter Ford, too, said of his club Gloucester: 'There were no class distinctions, no one was better than others' (and this among a group of men who ranged in occupation 'from road sweepers to top business people'). Phil Judd believed that 'rugby's rugby ... it doesn't matter a bugger where you come from – you play the game, and that's it'.<sup>108</sup> These statements are in line with rugby's usual self-image; that it is an inclusive sport played by people of all backgrounds and types. This self-image is present throughout the period studied here, and remains in place today. Prior to the 2015 World Cup, Bill Beaumont – a former England captain who at the time was Chairman of the RFU – stated in an interview that 'It's a game for all shapes and sizes,

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<sup>107</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 359; Steele-Bodger, interview; Raymond Maule, *The Complete Who's Who of England Rugby Union Internationals* (Derby: Breedon, 1992), 33.

<sup>108</sup> Beer, interview; Ford, interview; Judd, interview.

it's a game with no class distinction whatsoever'.<sup>109</sup> It is an understandable image when taken from the inside of the sport – there are often people from different backgrounds who play together, and undoubtedly there are many instances of those people enjoying each other's company and treating each other as equals.

We should, though, be wary of overplaying the 'classlessness' of the sport in this period. When rugby union is situated in the context of the larger picture of English society as a whole, it becomes difficult to argue with the long-held assumption about rugby as a middle-class sport. Looking at the education and occupations of the national team helps to demonstrate this. As was shown earlier in this chapter, the sport was played predominantly at grammar and private schools, and as such, the majority of England players had attended such schools. It is no surprise, therefore, that the overwhelming majority of England players in this period would also have been categorised as middle class when it came to their employment. Of the 219 England players in the period 1946-70 for whom there are employment details in Tony Collins' *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, over half were either teachers, company directors, armed forces officers, solicitors or doctors. Many more worked in sales, as engineers, as dentists, as managers, as insurance brokers – the list of middle-class jobs is a long one. The overwhelming evidence is that 'objectively' working-class players – those educated at non-selective state schools, and those with working-class jobs – were very much in the minority (as will be covered in more detail in the next chapter, only 10 per cent of the 219 players mentioned above could be said to have had

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<sup>109</sup> Rob Kitson, 'Chasing the Chariot: In Search of the Soul of English Rugby', *Guardian*, 4 September 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/ng-interactive/2015/sep/04/chasing-the-chariot-in-search-of-the-soul-of-english-rugby>.

working-class jobs).<sup>110</sup> Looking from the outside, rugby union in the fifteen years after the war remained a sport played, on the whole, by the middle classes.

Interviewees did occasionally stray from this self-image, both indirectly (or perhaps unconsciously) and in more direct terms. Phil Judd, for example, is quoted above as saying that in rugby, ‘it doesn’t matter a bugger where you come from’. At another point in the interview, however, where he discussed his time on national service, he explained that he felt he was often not picked for the RAF’s rugby team because his rival for selection was both of higher rank and played for Harlequins – a more ‘fashionable’ club than Coventry. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but Judd’s suggestion seemed to be that, as a working-class man from the Midlands, his face did not fit as well as that of the Flight Lieutenant and Harlequin.<sup>111</sup> If that was a more unconscious acknowledgement of the role of class in rugby, Ian Beer and Malcolm Phillips, interestingly both former RFU presidents, were slightly more direct. Phillips acknowledged the ‘predominance of middle class’ in the England team when considering their occupations – ‘Business executive types; teachers; professionals’ – while Ian Beer admitted that ‘the opportunity to play the game might have been limited’. Both, however, maintained that among those who did have that opportunity, the atmosphere was one of classlessness – as Phillips stated, there were ‘absolutely no social divisions’ in the England team he played for.<sup>112</sup> The distinction between classlessness on the inside – that those played together treated each other as equals – and class *limitation* from the outside – that the majority of those who played the game continued to be from the middle classes – is an important one. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the more subjective image provided from inside the sport gives us an

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<sup>110</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

<sup>111</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Beer, interview; Phillips, interview.



interesting insight into the collective view of the rugby ‘fraternity’, though we must ensure it is balanced by a more analytical picture taken from outside the sport.

David Cannadine, in *Class in Britain*, argues that what is perhaps most striking about Britain and class is not so much that it is more or less unequal than other societies, but that ‘the British *think* and *talk* about their inequality and immobility more’.<sup>113</sup> To conclude this section, though there may be some differences between the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ pictures of rugby union’s relationship with class, one thing that is certain is that English rugby union, especially in the era under discussion, backs up Cannadine’s theory. ‘Class divisions’, ‘middle-class’, ‘working-class’, ‘posh’, ‘it didn’t matter who you were or what you did’, ‘walks of life’, ‘moneyed people’: the interviews of players who played in this period are full of the language of class.<sup>114</sup> Rugby players, consciously or unconsciously, often discuss their sport in terms of social divisions, hierarchies and gradations – in short, in terms of class. However it defines its relationship with class, the image of rugby both from without and within is inextricably linked to it.

### **Work and playing the game**

The gentleman in charge of the drawing office come up and said ‘Excuse me – Mr Bennett, the manager, wants to see you up in his office right away.’ And I thought ‘My goodness’ ... He said ‘Congratulations John,’ and I said ‘What’s that then?’ And he said ‘We’ve just had the press on to say you’ve been picked to play against Ireland.’

*John Collins, interview.*

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<sup>113</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 170–71.

<sup>114</sup> Ford, interview; Phillips, interview; Danby, interview; Beer, interview.

Work, a vital component of class, is another area in which there were elements of both change and continuity in post-war England. Even the decade-and-a-half under consideration in this chapter experienced both. Rugby players, and rugby as a sport, were part of it all, for one main reason – rugby union was an amateur sport. Those who took part, even at the very highest level, were not just rugby players; they were, as we have seen, teachers, doctors, lawyers, army officers, businessmen – or even, like John Collins in the drawing office of the Climax Rock Drill and Engineering Works, draughtsmen.<sup>115</sup> Rugby union had been amateur since 1886, and continued to be so until 1995, long after most other major sports had professionalised. The sport therefore had a close relationship with the working world in the post-war era. Rugby union can therefore help us to form a picture of work in this period – of the jobs that (mainly middle-class) men did, and of the competing concepts of meritocracy and cronyism, and amateurism and professionalism.

In some significant senses, the face of employment was changing in the immediate post-war years. As noted in the previous section of this chapter, manual jobs continued to give way to clerical, administrative and managerial ones. The proportion of clerical workers in the British workforce increased from 7 per cent in 1931 to 10 per cent in 1951, while the share of managerial and administrative jobs increased from 4 per cent to 6 per cent. In the same period, the proportion of manual workers fell from 70 per cent to 64 per cent.<sup>116</sup> This trend was boosted by, among other things, the enlargement of the public sector (thanks to the construction of the welfare state and the nationalisation of many industries) and an increase in employment opportunities in the fields of science, technology and

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<sup>115</sup> Collins, interview.

<sup>116</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

engineering.<sup>117</sup> Alongside this change, the emerging concepts of meritocracy and professionalism also began to influence the way in which employees were recruited. Employment was increasingly dependent on qualifications and educational achievement – though as Arthur McIvor notes, and as will be clear from the first section of this chapter, educational achievement at this time was still generally restricted to the middle and upper classes.<sup>118</sup>

In other ways, though, it was ‘business as usual’. Ideas of meritocracy and professionalism had by no means entirely edged out the old ‘amateur’ ways. Cronyism was still prevalent. Just as it had done before the war, your background, and who you knew, could still get you far. In the period under consideration in this chapter, rugby union was situated towards this, more conservative, end of the working spectrum. It provided its participants with the social capital that allowed them access to opportunities in employment and education, and thus demonstrated the enduring anti-meritocratic power of social networks – the world of ‘doors opening’. As will be demonstrated, rugby at this time also represented the old way of working when it came to the practice of the sport itself, with little emphasis on training and a traditional amateur conviction that playing the game for its own sake, with its long-established values in mind, was more important than winning.

As noted above, the balance between manual and non-manual work in Britain continued to tip towards the latter in the immediate post-war years, as new clerical, administrative and managerial jobs were taken on by the middle classes. Given rugby’s place on the class spectrum, it is no surprise that the sport soon began to reflect this

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<sup>117</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 144.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 145; McIvor, *Working Lives*, 271.

societal change. Looking again at the employment details of England internationals provided in Tony Collins' *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, we can see not only that, as acknowledged earlier in this chapter, the vast majority of internationals were employed in 'middle-class' jobs, but also that certain non-manual job categories experienced a significant post-war increase. Between 1920 and 1939, of the 180 records, there is one known England international whose job came under the category of 'manager'. Between 1946 and 1970, this number increased to 11 (out of 219) – an increase from 1 per cent to 5 per cent. Similarly, looking at the job category of 'sales', another common area of clerical work, the number increases from 3 in the inter-war period (2 per cent), to a remarkable 22 between 1946 and 1970 (10 per cent). Indeed, 'sales' is the third most common job for an England international in that period after 'teacher' and 'company director/partner'.<sup>119</sup>

Chris Winn (an Oxford graduate who played on the wing for England between 1952 and 1954) and Malcolm Phillips embodied these trends. Both went into jobs in sales after university, and furthermore, both were employed within the burgeoning science, technology and engineering industries. Winn finished university in 1951, and was taken on by Imperial Chemical Industries:

They gave me a very small section. Then they sent me out on the road, with two pots of paint and a colour card, that's all. And I went to the East End of London. And the boss said 'You know, they won't love you in the East End,' he said 'You're so highfalutin, they'll know you've been to Oxford.' And how wrong he was. How wrong he was. Because I used to talk to them about football.

Winn eventually moved up to become Southern Regional Manager for ICI Paints Division, managing 'about thirty representatives', before moving into insurance.<sup>120</sup> Malcolm Phillips

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<sup>119</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

<sup>120</sup> Chris Winn, interview, 8 July 2015.

was also an Oxford graduate – he found a job in engineering when he had finished his studies:

In the end I got a job – actually, through Fylde Rugby Club, if I'm honest – with Simon Engineering in Stockport, who are a big engineering group. I was involved there in export sales of chemical plants, which I did for six years after university.

It is interesting to note not only the nature of Phillips' employment, but the way in which he found his job – 'through Fylde Rugby Club'. The role of rugby union as a network which helped players to find employment was one of the ways in which the sport reflected not change, but continuity with pre-war practices. As the 1950s progressed, the concept of meritocracy – a term popularised by Michael Young's satirical novel *The Rise of the Meritocracy* – was 'on the march'.<sup>121</sup> The importance of educational achievement and professional expertise, as opposed to socio-economic background, was increasingly recognised in the world of employment – simply being 'the right sort of chap' did not count for quite as much as it used to. David Kynaston, for example, notes that middle-class employment was 'appreciably more meritocratic' than it had been at the beginning of the century. Harold Perkin, meanwhile, believed that his concept of a 'professional society' – 'one in which people find their place according to trained expertise and the service they provide rather than the possession or lack of inherited wealth or acquired capital' – reached 'a plateau of attainment' between the end of the war and the early 1970s. More than ever before, wrote Perkin, England was 'a society which accepted in principle that ability and expertise were the only respectable justification for recruitment to positions of authority and responsibility'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033: An Essay on Education and Inequality* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958); Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, 203.

<sup>122</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 145; Perkin, *Professional Society*, 359; *Ibid.*, 405.

The important phrase here is ‘in principle’. The evidence from rugby union – such as that above from Malcolm Phillips – demonstrates that in practice, this was not always the case. While the sport may have been amateur, it could often be directly responsible for a player’s employment, or could contribute to the successful performance of his job. As Richard Holt and Tony Mason wrote in *Sport in Britain*, ‘Playing rugby at a good level ... was the route to a good job’; as Phil Judd put it, rugby ‘helped you to open doors’.<sup>123</sup> Margaret Stacey, in her study of the town of Banbury between 1948 and 1951, noted of the town’s aluminium factory:

It includes among its annual intake a number of public school men, whose qualification is just that they are public school men. They have a ‘social know-how’ that the management consider valuable. Playing rugger may in some circumstances, it is said, help a candidate to a staff position, provided he has other necessary qualifications.<sup>124</sup>

Just as rugby prowess assisted entry to university, then, it could also assist a player in getting a job, or helping him once he was in it. Talented rugby players – especially England internationals – often found that their status worked in their favour when it came to the professional sphere. Achievement in the sport acted as an exclusive form of currency – of social capital – in the world of employment.

In *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, Collins mentions, in a discussion of ‘the career value of rugby’, an episode in the novel *Doctor in the House* in which a prospective student is given a place at a medical college because of his rugby prowess.<sup>125</sup> Ted

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<sup>123</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 49; Judd, interview.

<sup>124</sup> Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 33.

<sup>125</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 106. Neil Carter, in *Medicine, Sport and the Body*, recounts the similar, real-life (though ‘probably apocryphal’) story of Lord Moran’s interest in rugby union while Dean of St Mary’s medical school. As Carter puts it, ‘It was claimed that in the middle of interviews with prospective medical students Moran would bend down below his desk and retrieve a rugby ball, which he then threw at the interviewee. If the

Woodward demonstrated that this sort of episode was by no means confined to fiction. Playing for Wasps as a schoolboy against St Mary's Hospital, Woodward was spotted by one of the hospital's foremost employees, the famous surgeon Arthur Dickson Wright. Dickson Wright, apparently impressed by Woodward's talents on the field, approached the young man. As Woodward himself described it, Dickson Wright said to him: "Woodward, you go back [to school] and get a scholarship, and you can come to St Mary's without paying any money and be a doctor".<sup>126</sup> While some academic achievement was required (which Woodward failed to attain, thanks to the fact that he 'didn't work very hard'), there can be little doubt that Dickson Wright was not in the habit of handing out scholarship offers to just any schoolboy. Woodward was no star student, and had no plans before that meeting to embark on a career in medicine.<sup>127</sup> Instead, here was rugby union acting as a network in which its high achievers had access to opportunities unavailable to others. Membership of the sport's network meant, as Bourdieu put it of his concept of social capital, that top-level rugby players did 'not need to "make the acquaintance" of all their "acquaintances"; they are known to more people than they know'. Being a top-level rugby player was 'a "credential"' in and of itself.<sup>128</sup>

As noted earlier, Woodward eventually took advantage of his sporting fame in another way. During most of his rugby career, including his time playing for England, Woodward was a butcher. He had taken over the family shop when his father passed away. Just nineteen years old at the time, Woodward struggled initially to get to grips with the business and to find time to play rugby. 'My sister was seventeen [and] we ran the butcher's

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interviewee caught the ball he was admitted; if he threw it back he earned a scholarship.' Neil Carter, *Medicine, Sport and the Body: A Historical Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 60.

<sup>126</sup> Woodward, interview.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Bourdieu, 'Forms of Capital', 90; Ibid., 88.

shop together,' he recalled, 'which was quite difficult because I'd never been a butcher in my life.' Woodward often worked in the shop on a Saturday morning before playing for Wasps in the afternoon, and when he played for England, which meant meeting up with the team on a Friday, his sister took charge. Eventually, in his late twenties, Woodward became tired of his job:

I had a great friend called Louis Stalder, who also played for the Wasps ... he was working for an insurance broker, and I was butchering, and we were both fed up, and we said 'well why don't we open a sports shop?'

They did so, in Gerrards Cross, and the shop became a great success – thanks, Woodward said, to his and Stalder's rugby fame: 'I got an awful lot of business, sports business, through playing rugby and being known as an international,' he remembered. The shop began to supply equipment to rugby clubs across the country, as well as to army bases abroad. By the end of his working life, Woodward and Stalder had not one shop, but five. His involvement in rugby has played an important part in his success:

It definitely made my life. Because when ... Dad started butchering, I mean we lived in a council house ... He worked jolly hard all his life ... and we certainly didn't make a lot of money in the butcher's shop. But it was when we were in the sports shop that we were more successful. Well, to help me, probably, have a house like this, you know; it was through rugby, really, which helped me fantastically.<sup>129</sup>

Woodward was certainly not the only top-level rugby player who benefited from the sport in their life away from the pitch. Malcolm Phillips, as previously noted, acknowledged that his first job after university was obtained 'through Fylde Rugby Club'.

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<sup>129</sup> Woodward, interview.



His description of how this happened would no doubt be familiar to many rugby players from the era:

There was a guy called Norman Hinton, who was the Finance Director of Simon Engineering, who was president of the club. He was keen for me to come back from Oxford, because I've got to say, I was playing with the idea of going to London, because I had half a season with Harlequins, and they were tempting me with jobs. But in the event, he did persuade me to come back north, so that I would continue with Fylde.

Not only, then, was Phillips effectively offered a job through Fylde; he had also had other offers through Harlequins. As many other Oxbridge rugby players did at the time, he had played a little for the London club during his time as a student. Keen to secure his services once he left university, the club made it clear there would be a number of jobs available to him. 'They were mostly sort of City-orientated,' he recalled; 'stockbroking, stuff like that.' He was ultimately, in fact, 'offered a job with a company called Tradex, who were a London-Swiss outfit, trading in various commodities.' Just as rugby had been central to this job offer, though, it was in fact central too to Phillips' decision to turn the offer down. He was worried that commuting between Geneva and London, as the job required, would not have allowed him to play the sport as regularly as he would have liked. Moving back up north and resuming his playing career with Fylde – his club before he had gone up to Oxford – would allow him more time to play rugby, he thought.<sup>130</sup>

Although top-level rugby union was not as much of a time commitment in the 1940s and 1950s as it would later become, players – especially internationals – still relied on the generosity of their employers to allow them time off to train and

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<sup>130</sup> Phillips, interview.

play (as recalled by a number of interviewees, the England team at this time would meet on a Friday afternoon before a match the following day).<sup>131</sup> This was the case with amateur sports in general. Holt and Mason note, for example, that in athletics, competitors ‘were expected to have benevolent employers’ (or, failing that, ‘families with deep pockets’).<sup>132</sup> In cricket, a sport still played at this stage by both amateurs and professionals, the issue was often alleviated by the employment of amateurs in sinecures by their own county clubs (Mike Smith, interviewed for this thesis, was one such cricketer – when he first joined Warwickshire in the late 1950s as an amateur, he was employed as an assistant secretary there).<sup>133</sup> In rugby union, generosity from employers was usually forthcoming. Micky Steele-Bodger recalled that an England international ‘had a job of work to do, but he would be given time off if he was playing for England or something like that.’ When asked if well-known rugby players were treated favourably by employers in general, Steele-Bodger replied that this was ‘without a doubt’ the case. He suggested that this was partly because international rugby players made desirable employees – they were ‘well-travelled ... and they would be able to hold their own in any company. And that’s what you want to employ, isn’t it?’ On top of that, it was often the case that ‘their boss loved the game’, and was therefore more than happy to recruit a famous rugby player. Indeed, as the decades advanced and rugby players began to receive more media exposure, more and more firms would begin to recognise the value of having a sporting celebrity in their ranks. As Ian Beer said of Wellington School, where he was teaching when he won his two England caps in 1955, having an international rugby

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<sup>131</sup> Winn, interview; Young, interview; Woodward, interview.

<sup>132</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 44.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, interview.

player at the school ‘was “good” for their PR’. This trend will be investigated further in later chapters.<sup>134</sup>

So it was, then, that top-level players would usually have no problem taking some time off to pursue their sport. Tom Danby, a teacher, recalled that he ‘had to get special permission ... from the education authorities’ to take part in England trial matches, but that ‘they were rather pleased to do it’. Malcolm Phillips, unsurprisingly given the connection between his employers and his rugby club, stated that Simon Engineering were ‘very good to [him]’ in allowing him to pursue a ‘serious’ rugby career.<sup>135</sup> John Collins, who also worked for an engineering firm, told the story of how his employers helped him when it came to his first England cap:

At that time, Holman Brothers had bought out Climax Rock Drill and Engineering Works [Collins’ employer] ... A gentleman I knew called Kenneth Allen, he was put in charge of all the movement – of transferring one lot of things to the other site. So he’s called up to the managing director and all of that, and there was a meeting, and [the managing director] said ‘Now Kenneth, what’s the first thing you’re going to do about this job?’ He said ‘The first thing I’m going to do is organise a special train for John Collins for when he’s playing at Twickenham against Ireland.’

The managing director, as Collins said, was ‘interested in rugby’ – so the train was organised without a problem.<sup>136</sup>

It should be pointed out that rugby players did not always get an easy ride. Micky Steele-Bodger recalled that when he took over one of his recently deceased father’s veterinary practices at the age of twenty-four, he was already well-known as a rugby player.

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<sup>134</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview; Ian Beer, ‘Re: Your Visit’, 20 February 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Danby, interview; Phillips, interview.

<sup>136</sup> Collins, interview.

‘That didn’t matter a bugger to the farmer’, though – the farmer wanted someone who could look after his animals, not someone who could ‘tell him how to sidestep’.<sup>137</sup> Even as a teacher at a public school, Ian Beer did not always find it easy to get time off. While teaching at Marlborough, Beer was selected to play in a final England trial match at Twickenham, which would require him to be in London on a Friday (with the match taking place the following day). His headmaster, Tommy Garnett, though ‘mad on games’, was not overly pleased:

He talked to the chairman of selectors while I was in the room and eventually agreed to let me go after I had taught on the Friday afternoon – not before. So I missed whatever practice there was on the Friday. He simply could not understand that a game required any planning, coaching – it was all done for fun, in spare time and your job always came first. A real true amateur.<sup>138</sup>

Overall though, being a top-level rugby player in this era was generally beneficial when it came to work. Rugby union was one area of society in which the cracks in the supposed new meritocratic order were exposed. Though, as noted earlier, Harold Perkin believed that his theorised professional society reached a ‘plateau of attainment’ in the thirty years or so after the war, he was also quick to point out its limitations. As he put it, ‘in practice, every society contains elements of both horizontal class and vertical interest’; or, in other words, ‘Professional society is based on merit, but some acquire merit more easily than others.’<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>138</sup> Beer, ‘Re: Your Visit’. The attitude of Beer’s headmaster here is indicative of an earlier, stricter form of amateurism than the one to which Beer adhered, demonstrating the way in which the philosophy shifted and weakened over time. Just as Beer’s version of amateurism may have seemed out of touch with that of those playing the sport in the 1990s (while Beer was a senior administrator in the RFU), so too, in this example, was Beer’s version of amateurism, while a player, at odds with that of one of his seniors.

<sup>139</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 359; *Ibid.*, 4.

If English rugby union represented the old way of doing things in this sense, it was also wedded to old methods when it came to the practice of the sport itself. In her aforementioned study of Banbury, Margaret Stacey offers a description of the attitudes and practices of ‘traditional’ businessmen in the town. It is a description that could easily have applied to the RFU and English rugby at the time:

The traditional business man in Banbury is, as has been shown, concerned less with making as much money as possible than he is with living comfortably and maintaining his social status and position ... His is not the attitude of the experimentalist; he is not always on the look-out for new and better ways of working ... The traditionalists seem to cling to old methods, materials, and employees, and to change from pressure of circumstances rather than from inclination.<sup>140</sup>

Rugby union reflected the persistence of the type of middle-class working culture that Stacey describes; a culture which valued amateur ideals. Although attitudes to management, training and professional expertise were beginning to modernise, Harold Perkin notes that in this era, ‘British management cherished a cultivated amateurism.’ It was the type of culture in which, as Gunn and Bell note, ‘Overt ambition was discouraged ... It was essential not to appear “pushy” or striving, not to be seen to be trying too hard. Work itself should appear effortless.’<sup>141</sup> No institution had ‘cherished a cultivated amateurism’ more over the years than English rugby union, and in the 1940s and 1950s, little changed. There were signs of incipient modernisation, but throughout this time, the game remained firmly committed to the amateur ideal and was largely resistant to any advances towards a more professional way of thinking. This was demonstrated by a lack of

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<sup>140</sup> Stacey, *Tradition and Change*, 31–32.

<sup>141</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 301; Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 196.

concerted training or coaching, a lack of full-blooded commitment to success, and certainly a lack of any thought that players should be rewarded financially for their efforts.

With regards to the latter point, Tom Danby expressed the most common attitude of the time:

I honestly don't think I thought about that ... I think just to be on the field, taking part, or talking about [the game], I think was enough ... You never, you never thought of money. You really didn't think anything about it.<sup>142</sup>

As noted earlier, Danby went on to play rugby league as a professional, and can therefore be considered to have been at the less evangelical end of the scale when it came to the sanctity of amateur rugby union. If money was not a consideration for him when playing rugby union, it was unlikely to have been for many others. Interestingly, though, this did not necessarily mean Danby and his fellow players were all staunch amateurs who actively believed in and promoted amateurism as an ideology. Interview testimony suggests that there was an extent to which they simply did not consider it; they unquestioningly accepted it as the status quo, happy so long as they were able to play their sport. As Peter Ford put it of amateurism, 'It's what we'd been brought up with, we didn't know any different.' Others expressed similar sentiments; Chris Winn, for example, said 'We didn't call it amateurism because there wasn't anything else really,' while Ted Woodward said 'Being amateur? Never thought anything about it.'<sup>143</sup> As will be explored further in this thesis, happily playing as an amateur was not, the oral evidence suggests, necessarily the same thing as being a true believer, prepared to defend it to the death against the evils of professionalism. There was

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<sup>142</sup> Danby, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Ford, interview; Winn, interview; Woodward, interview.

perhaps a greater level of ambivalence towards the amateur ideal among players than has previously been explored.

The amateur status quo was certainly, however, under very little threat in this era when it came to payment of players, and the same can largely be said of aspects of the sport such as training, coaching and performance. Nowhere, in fact, was the amateur approach to playing rugby more evident than at the highest level. The following quotations, from John Young and Chris Winn respectively, give a distinct impression of the lack of importance attached to training and preparation within the England team in the 1950s:

You turned up Friday afternoon at a hotel in Twickenham or Richmond or somewhere, and you just sort of checked in, had dinner with the guys, bombed over to Twickenham by bus, coach; got changed, played, went to the dinner in central London, staggered back, and then bombed off home for lunch on the Sunday.<sup>144</sup>

We used to turn up on a Friday afternoon, and we probably didn't change entirely ... I'd be wearing probably long trousers and plimsolls, and all we'd need to do is just limber up really. And then the pep talk ... the backs came over here, and the forwards were over there, then we went out into the field and played.<sup>145</sup>

Such an approach was typical of international rugby union at the time. Indeed, it was built into the regulations of the sport. In 1957, the International Rugby Board made an amendment to their by-laws stating that 'the period between the assembly of a team and the playing of a match should in all cases be as short as possible ... in the case of the Four Home Unions, they have agreed that this period should normally not exceed about 48 hours.'<sup>146</sup> This resolutely amateur approach extended to England trial matches, too. Ted

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<sup>144</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Winn, interview.

<sup>146</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 17 March 1957, London.

Woodward recalled that ‘there was never any training, or any get-together before, or any policy, or any tactics, or anything. There was nobody to coach us, we just played as we saw it.’<sup>147</sup> Preparation was left to the individual. Prior to a trial match in 1955, Mike Smith received a call from John Williams – the two were due to play together in the trial as half-back partners. ‘He said “Come down, we must have a run-out”,’ recalled Smith. ‘And I went down wherever he was, in a bachelor flat or something, and stayed the night – that was probably Friday afternoon before the trial on the Saturday.’<sup>148</sup> Rugby clubs, as opposed to the national side, would eventually begin to lead the way in coaching and training, but at this stage, most were far from progressive. John Collins remembered training at his club, Camborne:

When we trained, you see, we had no floodlights in those days, and you had to go around in the dark. Now that’s a good thing for some people because they didn’t do much training anyhow – they’d run round the field about ten times and they’d think, ‘Well that’s enough of that like really,’ all at the same pace, you know. Only trouble we had was when it was moonlight, people could see us and what we was doing, so we had to do a bit extra then.<sup>149</sup>

There were, it should be said, some early signs of progress in the fields of coaching and training in this era. In 1952, the RFU released *The Manual of Rugby Union Football*, and in 1954 they held their first coaching course, at Bisham Abbey. Ian Beer, though, who became involved in coaching at schools in the 1950s, recalled that despite these steps, ‘the majority of the RFU committee were either lukewarm or openly hostile to organised coaching.’<sup>150</sup> Certainly there is no great fanfare around the launch of the *Manual* in the RFU’s *Centenary*

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<sup>147</sup> Woodward, interview.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, interview.

<sup>149</sup> Collins, interview.

<sup>150</sup> H.F. Ellis, ed., *The Manual of Rugby Union Football: For Coaches and Players* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1952); Ian Beer, ‘A Brief Personal Account of the Development of Coaching Organised by the RFU, 1951-1994’ (Unpublished document, n.d.).



*History*, published in 1970 – the authors simply write the following: ‘Ten thousand copies of the Coaching Manual were published at a cost of £2,100’.<sup>151</sup> For the majority of those involved in English rugby at this time, and certainly for the national side, training was a perfunctory exercise. Coaching, thought many, was contrary to the amateur ideals of the game. The days of concerted coaching and planning for games were still a little way off.

Rugby union differed from other sports in this sense, though not entirely. Even in professional sports like football there was often a suspicion of coaching. Holt and Mason, for example, note that ‘most professional footballers were not interested in the tactics or theory of the game’, with even the likes of Stanley Matthews, ‘a dedicated trainer’, believing that ‘you could not tell an experienced professional how to play’.<sup>152</sup> Despite this, professional sportspeople naturally spent more time training than rugby union players did. Professional footballers in this era, for example, trained five days a week with their clubs, sometimes in both the mornings and afternoons – a significantly heavier workload than the two nights a week that rugby union players usually trained with their clubs.<sup>153</sup> The FA also appointed its first national team manager and director of coaching, Walter Winterbottom, in 1946, in an attempt to inculcate a more sophisticated training culture in English football.<sup>154</sup> Even other amateur sports appeared to be more willing than rugby union to countenance coaching; the Amateur Athletics Association, the governing body of British athletics, appointed Geoff Dyson as a professional head coach in 1947, while the Amateur Swimming Association appointed Harry Koskie in 1946 to perform a similar paid role.<sup>155</sup> It would not be until 1969 that English rugby union appointed its own paid ‘technical

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<sup>151</sup> Titley and McWhirter, *Centenary History of the Rugby Football Union*, 158.

<sup>152</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 68.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>154</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 47.

<sup>155</sup> Tegan Laura Carpenter, ‘Uneasy Bedfellows: Amateurism and Coaching Traditions in Twentieth Century British Sport’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2012), 66–67; *Ibid.*, 72.

administrator', as Don Rutherford's role was named (the wording carefully chosen to avoid any direct reference to coaching).<sup>156</sup> As well as its amateur status, rugby union's lack of coaching development in comparison to other sports may also, as Martin Polley suggests, have been partly down to the fact that it was more insulated than most other sports from the exposure of global competition – a driving factor for improvement in the coaching culture of sports such as football and athletics.<sup>157</sup> English rugby union lacked such high-profile barometers of international prestige as football's World Cup or the Olympic Games. Its own concerns about the performance of its national team would take longer to develop, and would in particular be influenced by a prolonged lack of success in the 1960s and 1970s.

As can be deduced from the lack of importance attached to training and performance, the ambivalent amateur attitude towards the significance of victory was also still prevalent in this era. While players and those in charge of teams clearly wanted to win, the emphasis on victory was not what it would later become. Rugby union, even at international level, was still overwhelmingly treated as a 'hobby'.<sup>158</sup> As Howard Marshall wrote in Teddy Wakelam's *The Game Goes On* in 1954, the sport was 'not intended for highly trained athletes but for reasonably fit men who like their exercise on a Saturday afternoon'.<sup>159</sup> This was a traditional aspect of the sport that those in charge were keen to guard, as evidenced not only by the IRB's limitation on the time teams could spend together before matches, but also by their annual meeting in 1960 at which they 'discussed

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<sup>156</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>157</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 46.

<sup>158</sup> Beer, interview; Phillips, interview.

<sup>159</sup> Howard Marshall, 'What Rugger Means to Me', in *The Game Goes On*, ed. H.B.T. Wakelam (London: The Sportsman's Book Club, 1954), 73.

fully the responsibility on member Unions to reduce any danger that might exist of over-emphasis on victory'.<sup>160</sup>

There are examples of this in the testimony of rugby players. Both Ted Woodward and Malcolm Phillips won the Five Nations championship with England in the 1950s. Though this would be considered an achievement of great importance today, neither of them recall it being so in their era. Woodward said that he 'can't even remember what happened' when England won the 1953 championship. 'I can't even remember thinking we'd won a championship ... there was nothing exceptional about it'. Similarly Malcolm Phillips, who won the 1958 championship with England, said that although winning it was important to the players and fans, it was 'nothing like it is now. I mean now they're shouting the odds from September onwards, aren't they? No it wasn't like that in our day'.<sup>161</sup> Phil Judd, who started playing for Coventry in the early 1950s, believed that his club was unpopular because they 'didn't go out to play rugby, [they] went out to play rugby *and* win.' Judd did not think 'that was looked upon as the right attitude to take'.<sup>162</sup> The modern sporting concept of 'winning at all costs', in other words, was certainly not familiar to the majority of rugby union players at that time.

Overall, rugby union in this era was still very much defined by its amateur status. While there were some indications of change to this by the end of the 1950s, it would not be until later decades that any real change in this realm would take place. Both rugby's relationship with the working world off the pitch and its own occupational culture on the pitch are examples of the persistence in England of certain pre-war ideals with regards to work. In rugby union, 'cultivated amateurism' still held sway ahead of trained, professional

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<sup>160</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 18-19 March 1960, Edinburgh.

<sup>161</sup> Woodward, interview; Phillips, interview.

<sup>162</sup> Judd, interview.

expertise, and the sport's social network demonstrated that 'who you knew' – as opposed to 'what you knew' – could still get you far.

## National service

I was posted to Uxbridge so I could play for Wasps on a Saturday.

*Ted Woodward, interview.*

In this era, many young English men experienced one particular form of work for up to two years of their lives – service in the armed forces. National service was introduced by the National Service Act of 1947, with the first conscripts joining up in 1948. The 1947 Act heralded the first period of peacetime conscription the country had seen.<sup>163</sup> The role of rugby union, and sport in general, in national service is worthy of discussion here. The experience of rugby players on national service reinforces many of themes discussed so far – particularly the importance of the class system in England and rugby union's place within it, and the tendency of the sport to act as a form of social currency which could 'open doors' to its players.

The reasons for the introduction of national service were largely practical, rather than moral or political. After the Second World War had come to an end, Britain was left with a still-substantial empire to defend, as well as the need to maintain an occupying force in parts of Europe. The only way to 'meet immediate military needs', as Richard Vinen has put it, was to compel people to join up ('In other words,' writes David Kynaston, national

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<sup>163</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 369.

service happened ‘for essentially geopolitical purposes’).<sup>164</sup> Under the National Service Act, all men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six were required to serve in the armed forces for a period of eighteen months (the upper age limit would later be increased to thirty-five, and the period of service increased to two years – the latter due to the onset of the Korean War in 1950). In total, over 1.7 million men entered the armed forces as conscripts between January 1948 and December 1960, with the last remaining national servicemen demobbed in May 1963.<sup>165</sup> A whole generation of young British men, therefore, experienced military service outside of wartime, and subsequently occupy a peculiar place in their country’s history.

Sport played a significant part in the national service experiences of many, and was often taken particularly seriously by those in charge. As Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi wrote in their study of sport and the military in Britain, ‘sport ... had become a well-established part of service life well before the end of the Second World War.’<sup>166</sup> This was due to the fact that sport helped to improve physical fitness and morale (especially when it came to team sports like rugby), as well as bestowing prestige upon the forces and helping to foster stronger links with civil society.<sup>167</sup> With specific regards to post-war national service, as Trevor Royle has written, ‘sport was considered a good thing: it kept men fit and team games had the useful military function of maintaining motivation to succeed, and of developing leadership qualities.’<sup>168</sup> In fact, as Mason and Riedi state, the importance of sport in the military was ‘underlined when conscription was reintroduced.’<sup>169</sup> The sudden

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Vinen, *National Service: Conscription in Britain, 1945-1963* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 34; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 369.

<sup>165</sup> Vinen, *National Service*, 8; *Ibid.*, xxv.

<sup>166</sup> Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces, 1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 217.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>168</sup> Trevor Royle, *National Service: The Best Years of Their Lives* (London: André Deutsch, 2011), 131.

<sup>169</sup> Mason and Riedi, *Sport and the Military*, 217.

mobilisation of the country's most talented young sportsmen meant that many officers actively went in search of such individuals, hoping to recruit them to their units. Royle, for example, writes of the 1st Training Regiment, Royal Signals, that 'good sportsmen' were often 'pulled in that direction by the regiment's "talent scouts"'.<sup>170</sup>

If it was not known in advance that a good rugby player, skilful batsman or talented athlete was about to join the ranks, it usually would not be long before word got out. Once a young serviceman's talents had been uncovered, it often made for a more enjoyable and more comfortable time than he would otherwise have experienced. According to Mason and Riedi, 'there is no doubt that sportsmen with a reputation ... could find more comfortable billets than the average conscript'.<sup>171</sup> Royle, indeed, writes that 'for those men fortunate enough to be good at sport their service careers could be one long skive,' noting that many 'were excused military duties altogether or found their way into "cushy" billets'.<sup>172</sup> Tony Thorne, in his national service memoir *Brasso, Blanco and Bull*, notes this as he remembers a sporting star among the ranks of his unit:

[P]erhaps the most celebrated of the whole group was another ex-public school type in No. 2 Squad. He was called Anthony Hole and his reputation, as one of the outstanding schoolboy sportsmen of his generation, had run ahead of him ... [H]is prowess as a rugby player had already singled him out for special attention in the Army. There was one certain way to escape the routine of the Army and that was to excel at sports. Anyone who reached a high standard at football or rugby, anyone who could run or jump and especially anyone who could box, was assured of a few short cuts ... The horizons of an Army sportsman knew no bounds.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Royle, *National Service*, 131.

<sup>171</sup> Mason and Riedi, *Sport and the Military*, 222.

<sup>172</sup> Royle, *National Service*, 130.

<sup>173</sup> Tony Thorne, *Brasso, Blanco and Bull* (London: Robinson, 2000), 50–1.

As one Private put it of his regiment, 'If you can play rugger here, you can get away with anything.'<sup>174</sup> The favoured treatment received by sportsmen is indeed echoed in the testimony of rugby union players. Malcolm Phillips joined the East Lancashire Regiment in 1954, and was put forward for national service commission. After passing the War Office Selection Board, the series of tests designed to select potential officers, he was eventually posted to join the British Army of the Rhine in Germany. There, he found his rugby and athletics skills made things 'a lot easier':

It got you out of things, no question. If you played for Rhine Army, which I did at athletics and rugby, you had time off. I mean, we used to go to Berlin – I remember competing in a meeting at the Olympic Stadium there. So that was a few days off!<sup>175</sup>

Don Rutherford, who had been posted to RAF Barton Hall, near Preston, also remembered the favourable treatment he got as a result of playing rugby:

I was playing for the RAF because they'd heard about me and so forth, and they used to keep an eye on people coming in. And [the RAF] said '[you] play for Preston Grasshoppers, that's not good enough ... We're going to transfer you.' So they transferred me to Uxbridge, and I played for the Wasps for a year.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, he was not the only one to whom this happened. Ted Woodward, already a Wasps player as a schoolboy, found his rugby connections intervening in a very similar fashion.

'We had a wing commander playing for the Wasps, and he seemed to ... pull a few strings', recalled Woodward. 'I was posted to Uxbridge so I could play for Wasps on a Saturday.'<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Peter Doyle and Paul Evans, *National Service* (Oxford: Shire, 2012), 38.

<sup>175</sup> Phillips, interview.

<sup>176</sup> Rutherford, interview.

<sup>177</sup> Woodward, interview.

Mike Smith, another interviewee who experienced national service, pointed out that being a talented sportsman could even potentially be life-saving:

You could get into a bit of bother, in that national servicemen got killed – then, it was Malaysia, Korea, and whatever ... If you played sport, it may have been that they hung on to you a bit, because they were keen on sport in the Army and the other services.<sup>178</sup>

Smith is indeed correct that a number of national servicemen lost their lives – around 400 conscripts are thought to have been killed in action.<sup>179</sup> As to whether anyone avoided such a fate through sporting talent, it is impossible to say – but Smith's immediate memory of national service is certainly that being a sportsman led to favourable treatment.<sup>180</sup>

Peter Ford was another young rugby player whose sporting talent assisted him during national service. He had initially been posted to Wilmslow for basic training, but he was keen to return to his beloved home town of Gloucester. Noticing that 'the cookery courses were at Gloucester', he 'went on a course to be a cook'. The young Ford had no real interest in cooking, however, and following an examination, he was called in front of the officer in charge of the catering section to explain his poor mark – he had got only one correct answer out of 100:

He [the officer] said 'Do I read from this you don't want to be a cook?' And I thought 'careful here'; I said 'Well, it's very difficult being in the cookhouse – steam, etcetera – and then going to play rugby.' 'Ah, righto' [said the officer]. [I was taken] out of the cookhouse, into the ration store where they distributed the food

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<sup>178</sup> Smith, interview.

<sup>179</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this uncertain figure, see Vinen, *National Service*, 12.

<sup>180</sup> Smith, interview.



... They kicked a sergeant out who was in charge – put me ... with no rank at all, in charge – and I ran that for two years.<sup>181</sup>

Although Ford did not enjoy his time on national service, describing the two years as ‘wasted’, his rugby talents had at least made things a little more straightforward for him.

Rugby could also act as a form of social currency when it came to passing the WOSB, and being sent for training as an officer. Richard Vinen, in *National Service*, relates a story that has echoes of the discussion earlier in this chapter of Tony Collins’ *Doctor in the House* example, and Ted Woodward’s real-life version. Vinen tells the story of W.J.R. Morrison, who was called up in 1949:

[He] did not regard himself as ‘much of a soldier’. He had done badly in the practical tests that were administered to recruits and was described at this stage as a ‘potential clerk’ but, like most public school boys, he was posted to a potential officers’ platoon. He sailed through WOSB: ‘When it subsequently came out that I had played for English Public Schools earlier in the year I was home and dry. We only discussed rugby as far as I remember.’ He eventually won the prize for best cadet in his officer training – still, he thought, because of the rugby.<sup>182</sup>

Vinen, indeed, includes rugby union more than once in his descriptions of what constituted so-called ‘officer material’. As well as the example above, he notes that his own father-in-law had ‘officerly qualities because he was a Christian and a rugby player’ and ‘had been educated at a ... grammar school’. Later, he quotes the diary of a national serviceman named Peter Mayo, whom he describes as ‘perfect officer material: a rugby player and a Christian, he had been head boy at a major public school’.<sup>183</sup> Much like it had been before the Second World War – thanks in part to the lasting legend of rugby’s sacrifice in the First

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<sup>181</sup> Ford, interview.

<sup>182</sup> Vinen, *National Service*, 203–4.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., xx; Ibid., 213–14.

World War – rugby was still seen as the sport of the officer, the recreational embodiment of the gentlemanly qualities required to be a military leader.<sup>184</sup> This, as ever, was firmly tied in to the schools in which the sport was played.

National service also helped many young rugby players to advance their careers on the pitch. It not only allowed them the opportunity of playing for high-profile armed forces teams, but also acted as an arena in which they could make connections and meet others with influence in the sporting world. Tom Danby, for example, credited the Army with launching his rugby career. During his time on national service, he not only played for the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, but the Army and the Combined Services too. He notes that for the Army, he ‘played alongside people like Jack Matthews, of Wales; Nim Hall, England fly-half; and Ken Jones, the winger of Wales.’ Furthermore, his appearance for the Combined Services was not just against any old team – it was against Australia, at Twickenham.<sup>185</sup>

As well as this high-profile playing experience, Danby also made connections that helped him advance in the world of rugby. The commander of the RAOC Training Centre happened to be Brigadier Terence Hugh Clarke CBE. As well as his distinguished military career, Clarke had represented the Army at rugby union.<sup>186</sup> On hearing of Danby’s talent, he was keen to ensure the young recruit played as much as possible:

I was sent for, and we had words, and he said ‘Danby, we’re going to get you into the Army team!’ ... [F]rom then onwards, they took me everywhere – the Brigadier and Colonel Tooley, who was about five foot, with a big moustache, charming little man, always with the Brigadier. And I sat with the driver in the front of course.

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<sup>184</sup> For further detail on rugby union and the First World War, see Chapter Three of Collins, *Social History*.

<sup>185</sup> Danby, interview.

<sup>186</sup> ‘Clarke, Brig. Terence Hugh’, *Who Was Who, Online Edition*, accessed 6 January 2016, <http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U171703>.

And I was taken all over to play for the RAO, and then eventually picked for the Army, and then the Combined Services. And the Brigadier, who was an ex-Harlequin, said ‘Danby, we’re going to get you into the Quins.’ So he got in touch with Adrian Stoop, and next thing I was playing for the Quins.<sup>187</sup>

It was therefore thanks to national service that Danby ended up at the well-to-do London club – an otherwise unlikely destination, as outlined earlier in this chapter. It was a more likely destination for someone like Ian Beer – though again, it was national service that provided the connection, as he related:

Playing for Rhine Army, there was a bloke who was the baggage man – Colonel...can’t remember – who turned out to be the scout for the Harlequins. And he took me on one side in the corridor of a train between Iserlohn and Hamburg, and said ‘Ian, wouldn’t you like to join the Harlequins?’<sup>188</sup>

Future England internationals did not always have it their own way when it came to national service rugby, though. Phil Judd would go on to win twenty-two England caps, captaining his country five times – but he could not quite make it into the RAF side for the team’s choicest fixtures (the inter-services matches or games against the likes of Guy’s Hospital – ‘the good-time Charlie games’, as Judd described them), losing out to a rival for the prop position by the name of G.P. Vaughan. Judd put this down to the fact that his club, Coventry, was not as fashionable as Harlequins, who Vaughan played for. On top of that, Vaughan was a commissioned officer (a Flight Lieutenant), while Judd ‘was just LAC Judd’ – a junior, non-commissioned rank.<sup>189</sup> Whether or not these were the true reasons for Judd’s non-selection, the story demonstrates that top-class sportsmen did not universally

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<sup>187</sup> Danby, interview.

<sup>188</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>189</sup> Judd, interview.

have it their own way on national service – if only for the simple fact that there were so many of them around.

Judd's comments also reflect the fact that the armed forces were institutions dominated by the concept of class, which was built into them by the existence of ranks and the separation of officers from the rest. On the one hand, those who experienced the forces through national service often ended up mixing with people from different social backgrounds. Ian Beer, for example, recalled revising Latin for some upcoming examinations while sat 'next to an erstwhile burglar, and a chap who flogged Wall's ice creams, who simply couldn't understand me at all.'<sup>190</sup> As Kynaston notes, the 'melting-pot' of national service may in theory have contributed to greater social cohesion once recruits returned to civilian life; though 'it is equally if not more probable that national service served at least as much to reinforce as to undermine existing social structures and attitudes.'<sup>191</sup> Doyle and Evans note, indeed, that 'men of similar backgrounds often stuck together.'<sup>192</sup>

Whatever the case, in terms of class, national service broadly reflected civilian society. Certain categories of men tended to have a better chance than others. Vinen has pointed out that 66 per cent of national service officers came from the south of England, and that a 'public school education was the single most important asset for a potential officer, and the kind of education that a man had received mattered more than its extent or academic distinction.'<sup>193</sup> Kynaston concludes that national service 'seldom shook up predetermined life chances.'<sup>194</sup> Within this environment, as it did in civilian society, rugby

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<sup>190</sup> Beer, interview.

<sup>191</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 370; *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>192</sup> Doyle and Evans, *National Service*, 37.

<sup>193</sup> Vinen, *National Service*, 206; *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>194</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 162.

union acted as a helpful form of social currency for many. Being a rugby player indicated that you were from the right sort of background, had been to the right sort of school, and were the ‘right sort of chap’ – all useful qualifications to have when it came to national service. The attraction of sport to the military also meant rugby players received favourable treatment; whether that was in the form of time away from the drudgery of day-to-day exercises, favourable postings or simply the chance to play the game they loved at a high standard. As it did in the world of civilian work, rugby helped to open doors to national servicemen – both through the appeal of sporting prowess to those in charge, and through the connotations rugby held in terms of personal character and background.

## Conclusion

In the immediate post-war years, Britain was gradually recovering after six years of chaotic upheaval. Change was afoot, and many new structures had been put in place, but the impact of social change had not yet been keenly felt. Paul Addison, in *No Turning Back*, sees these new structures – ‘a Labour government, full employment, and a welfare state’ – as being ‘super-imposed on a country that remained morally and culturally conservative,’ while Arthur Marwick has suggested that the late 1940s and the 1950s were a time in which ‘certain consequences of the war were clarified [and] certain continuities of British society re-established’.<sup>195</sup> Peter Hennessy broadly agrees – though he claims that ‘Britain had never experienced a progressive phase to match 1945-51’, he also points out that ‘a case could

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<sup>195</sup> Addison, *No Turning Back*, 403; Marwick, *British Society*, 18.

easily be made for mid-century Britain as the most settled, deferential, smug, undynamic society in the advanced world'.<sup>196</sup>

Dominic Sandbrook echoes Hennessy, stating that 'Britain in the fifties was one of the most conservative, stable and contented societies in the world,' and it is this picture that is offered to us by the evidence from rugby union.<sup>197</sup> As this chapter has shown, the sport returned to its own 'conservative, stable and contented' position in society in the fifteen years after the war. It remained in this time very much an amateur sport, nurtured by private and grammar schools, and played and run by the middle classes. There were, furthermore, few signs of change in those characteristics. When assessing what rugby union in the late 1940s and the 1950s can tell us about English society as a whole, then, the sport reminds us of wider continuities: that the class system, whatever the incipient changes in its composition, remained a powerful force; that whatever the changes in education, inequality remained built in to the system; and that despite the increased acceptance of a meritocratic ideal, and the increased importance of professional and technical expertise, 'who you knew' – as opposed to 'what you knew' – could still get you a long way.

David Kynaston has written of the immediate post-war period that 'social and cultural life reverted after 1945 to familiar patterns.'<sup>198</sup> Going further, he has stated:

[A]t the level of generalisation, one can plausibly argue that in some sense British society was 'frozen' during the ten or so years after the war, that there was for most people, following the shake-up of the war, an instinctive retreat to familiar ways, familiar rituals, familiar relations.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> *Never Again*, 454; *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>197</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 31.

<sup>198</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 138.

<sup>199</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 133–34.

This is the society presented to us by the evidence from rugby union – one in which familiar ways, rituals and relations were re-established. In the following decades, the sport, like the society in which it operated, would experience a greater amount of change – though the power of these familiar ways would also once again be evident.

## Chapter Three

### Transition: 1960-1979

#### Introduction

On Saturday 16 January 1960, the sixties began in earnest for English rugby union. It was the opening day of the Five Nations championship, and Wales were due at Twickenham. ‘The ground was in good condition after being covered with straw’, wrote *The Times*, ‘and the afternoon surprisingly mild ... Admirable conditions, in fact, for a fast, open game before a vast crowd’.<sup>1</sup> The air of anticipation was heightened by the fact that the England selectors had picked no fewer than seven new caps for the game. How would the new-look England side fare?

They faced a stern challenge. As one of the men who won his first England cap that day pointed out, Wales had a ‘bloody good side, because a lot of them had been on the ’59 [British Lions] tour to New Zealand.’ These are the words of Don Rutherford, the twenty-two-year-old Percy Park player, who was making his first appearance as England full-back and would be taking kicking duties that day. Another of England’s new recruits, Richard Sharp, was playing in the pivotal position of fly-half. He would go on to become one of England’s most famous names, but he was not particularly well known at this point. ‘I didn’t know him’, said Rutherford, ‘and most of the team [said] “who’s this lad?” I remember that question very strongly. And he was brilliant.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 18 January 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Rutherford, interview.



Rutherford, Sharp and the other debutants had a day to remember, helping England to a 14-6 victory over their visiting rivals. Jim Roberts, playing for the first time on the wing for England, scored two tries in a game ‘full of movement and incident’, while Rutherford made a ‘splendid first appearance’, sending two penalties and one conversion through the posts (the latter, reported *The Times*, ‘cost the RFU a ball’ after ‘someone standing on the south terrace ... seemed determined on a souvenir – and another had to be used’).<sup>3</sup> Sharp, in his first year of a geography degree at Oxford, had played at Twickenham in the Varsity match a month or so earlier (as well as for the Royal Navy, while on national service, against the Army and the RAF).<sup>4</sup> Those experiences had prepared him well; it was declared of his debut performance for England that ‘few men have ever made a more telling first appearance.’<sup>5</sup> The Welsh had been vanquished, new heroes had been discovered and even the weather was picking up – the 1960s could barely have started more promisingly for English rugby.

As set out in the previous chapter, the post-war 1940s and the 1950s were an era in which England largely returned to pre-war social norms. Rugby union – a middle-class, conservative sport – reflected their endurance. The extent to which the pace of change, both within and outside the sport, accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s is the subject of this chapter. The rise of coaching, a cup competition for English clubs and the advent of RFU-sanctioned sponsorship and advertising during these decades all hinted at a modernising – perhaps even ‘professionalising’ – sport. Indeed, Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, writing in 1979, believed that rugby had become ‘to all intents and purposes, a professional sport’.<sup>6</sup> While English rugby moved tentatively towards professionalism in some senses,

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<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 18 January 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Sharp, letter.

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 18 January 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 199.

though, other aspects of the sport remained much as they had done before the war. The sport's social foundation changed very little in these years, and the testimony of players indicates that many of the themes explored in the previous chapter – those relating to rugby's place within education, class and work – continued into the 1960s and 1970s.

This was a transitional time for rugby union in England. It was a period which saw the sport caught between the old world and the new, reluctantly embracing some aspects of the latter but resisting others. In the country at large, the pace of change, in some senses, was accelerating; Arthur Marwick, for example, has referred to the 1960s as a time of 'unprecedented interaction and acceleration'.<sup>7</sup> In recent years, however, the popular idea of the 1960s and 1970s as a time of unprecedented social transition has been challenged, not least by the work of Dominic Sandbrook who points out that shifts in this period should not be exaggerated 'at the expense of the continuities', and that 'change often came slowly'.<sup>8</sup> Among this tension between change and continuity, rugby union largely represented those who clung to hierarchy, class, amateurism and cronyism – the old ways of doing things. This chapter will continue to explore the themes of education, class and work, as well as observing English rugby's relationship with apartheid South Africa, a controversial issue which sheds light on the nature and social foundations of the sport. In doing so, it will highlight the 1960s and 1970s as a time of tension between change and continuity in both rugby and society in general. To begin with, it will discuss the evolution of rugby's relationship with the education system.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, 'Against the Permissive Society: The Backlash of the Late 1960s', in *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 68; Sandbrook, *White Heat*, xvii.

## Education

Most of the players who were on the team trial sheet, they were from the public schools and grammar schools, so there was always a feeling of: ‘hang on a minute, am I in the right place?’

*Gary Pearce, interview.*

In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that, despite changes brought about by the Butler Act, education in England remained unequal and hierarchical, and that rugby retained its hallowed position as the chief winter sport of private and grammar schools, reflecting those characteristics. In the 1960s and 1970s, the education system went through further changes; most notably an expansion of higher education, and a shift away from the tripartite system and towards comprehensive schooling. How, if at all, did this affect rugby union? Alongside and often because of these changes, there was a certain level of democratisation of the sport within education – more state schools began to play it and, at university and college level, Oxbridge dominance was challenged. Despite these changes, though, the power base of the sport remained the private and grammar schools, with the latter increasingly providing the country’s top players. Rugby union was part of an education system that, while changing, retained an inherent inequality.

If the Butler Act was the major development within English secondary education in the immediate post-war period, the expansion of comprehensive schooling was the biggest change of the 1960s and 1970s. The idea of a school for children of all abilities and social backgrounds was not a new one – so-called ‘multilateral’ schools had been debated since

the 1920s. The concept did not, however, gain traction within government for some time.<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive schools began to emerge after the war – by 1948, London County Council had created eight ‘interim’ comprehensives by joining selective schools with secondary moderns – but support for them was very limited.<sup>10</sup> Support within the Labour Party gradually became more widespread, though, and in 1951 the party declared itself in favour of the implementation of new comprehensive schools. While the Conservative governments of the 1950s and early 1960s did their best to limit the growth of comprehensives, preferring the tripartite approach, growing concerns over the efficacy of the eleven-plus and the social ramifications of selection meant that purpose-built comprehensives began to emerge and increase in number (under the direction of both Labour and Conservative-controlled local authorities). In 1950, there had been just ten comprehensive schools in England and Wales. By 1965, there were 262.<sup>11</sup>

It was in 1965 that Anthony Crosland, Secretary of State for Education and Science in Harold Wilson’s first Labour government, issued Circular 10/65 to the LEAs. It requested that LEAs submit plans for the reorganisation of secondary schooling along comprehensive lines, thus making comprehensivisation, in effect, national policy. Wilson’s second government went further – the 1976 Education Act *required* LEAs to submit such plans, as a means of stirring reluctant local authorities into action.<sup>12</sup> The result of all this was a huge increase in the number of comprehensives and a sharp decrease in the number of grammar schools. By 1970, there were 1,145 comprehensives in England and Wales, and by 1980, that figure had increased to 3,297 – 80 per cent of all public secondary schools.

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<sup>9</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 151–52.

<sup>10</sup> Simon, *Education*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 276–82; *Ibid.*, 440.

The number of grammar schools in 1980 was 224; over 1,000 fewer than there had been in 1960.<sup>13</sup>

The expansion of comprehensive schooling and the concomitant decline of grammar schools would seem, on the surface, to spell danger for school rugby. Grammar schools, along with private schools, were the heartbeat of the sport – non-selective schools did not generally have the same attachment to it. In fact, though, the rise of comprehensives did not herald a decline in school rugby. As Tony Collins has stated, ‘the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1960s and 1970s ... led to more schools taking up the game’, with newly founded comprehensives seeking the ‘social cachet’ of being a rugby-playing school.<sup>14</sup> ‘Many of the original comprehensives’, as Gunn and Bell have written, ‘had begun with the idea of providing a grammar school education for all, complete with uniforms, streaming and houses’; rugby union, in many cases, was also included in this list.<sup>15</sup> The increase in the number of schools taking up the sport may also have been partly due to what David Kirk refers to as the ‘spectacular rise to prominence of competitive games and sports in secondary school physical education’ in the post-war period – a rise linked, as the aforementioned ‘social cachet’ was, to the supposed educational and character-building value of games playing (‘a version’, says Kirk, ‘of the public school games ethic’).<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, large numbers of state schools began to take up rugby from 1960 onwards, as is demonstrated by the figures for schools affiliated to the RFU. In 1960, there were 362 such schools, of which just 31 were state schools (9 per cent). By 1980, the overall number had increased to 1,615, of which 66 per cent – 1,063

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<sup>13</sup> Bolton, ‘Education’, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 104.

<sup>15</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Kirk, *Defining Physical Education*, 84.

schools – were state schools. In 1980, there were a total of 3,662 state schools in England. At least 27 per cent of them, therefore, were playing rugby by this stage.<sup>17</sup>

It was therefore no surprise that many of the new comprehensives included rugby union in their sporting curricula. One such school was The Woodlands School in Coventry, a boys' comprehensive founded in 1954.<sup>18</sup> Peter Rossborough began teaching at the school in September 1971. It was his first job after completing a degree in English and French, followed by a PGCE, at Durham University, and earlier that year he had won his first England cap. He had originally applied for a job at his old school, King Henry VIII (a direct grant school), and had been accepted – but rugby had intervened:

Having been offered a job [at King Henry VIII] and accepted it, I was then selected to go on the England tour to the Far East in September, at the beginning of term. And I wrote to King Henry VIII and asked if I could have time off to go on this tour, this England tour; they said 'no', because I wouldn't even have started at the school at the time. My wife then spotted there was a job going at The Woodlands – I applied to that, was appointed to it, they agreed to allow me to go on the tour ... It was part of our terms and conditions of employment ... If you represented your county or your region, let alone your country, then you were free to go and take up those offers.<sup>19</sup>

It was therefore the comprehensive school, and not the direct grant (which had supplied such internationals as David Duckham, Peter Preece and Rossborough himself), that was happy to accommodate Rossborough's rugby-playing request.

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<sup>17</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 219; Bolton, 'Education', 16; 'Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics', *Welsh Government*, accessed 19 February 2016, <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/digest-welsh-historical-statistics/>.

<sup>18</sup> G. Billington, 'The History of The Woodlands School', *Woodlands Academy*, accessed 19 February 2016, [https://www.woodlands.coventry.sch.uk/school\\_info.php?page=history](https://www.woodlands.coventry.sch.uk/school_info.php?page=history).

<sup>19</sup> Rossborough, interview.

Rossborough went on to describe his experience of teaching at the school, and it is clear that the idea of ‘a grammar school education for all’ was present in at least some forms. The house system was one of these – and so was rugby:

It had a strong focus on the house system, which is something that was transported from public school into the comprehensive system ... It meant there were huge numbers of inter-house activities – music and drama, and clearly every sport going, effectively. So every house had its own rugby team ... 90 per cent of the boys played sport of some sort.<sup>20</sup>

The Woodlands School was just one example of many new comprehensives that were playing rugby union in the 1960s and 1970s, and in doing so, were helping to boost state school participation.

While more state schools were playing the game in the 1960s and 1970s, however, private and grammar schools remained the sport’s true bastions. Playing rugby union was one thing – playing it regularly, and to a high standard, was another. Private and grammar-school domination of rugby is evident in the testimony of former England players. Roger Uttley, for example, played for England between 1973 and 1980, winning twenty-three caps in the forward pack. He was born in Blackpool in 1949, and as the 1960s were beginning, the young Uttley had his mind on a dreaded exam: ‘Things started to change when the eleven-plus started to loom, because I don’t think I was the most attentive pupil,’ he recalled. Uttley failed the eleven-plus ‘and ended up going to Montgomery Secondary Modern School’. It was there that he was introduced to rugby. Showing talent, Uttley was selected for various schoolboy representative teams, including England Schoolboys in 1968 – though by this time, he had moved to Blackpool Grammar School after obtaining the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

required O-levels to join their sixth form. He described his experience of representative school rugby as follows:

The game in those days was not viewed as a terribly meritocratic sport. If you came from a good school, or an independent school, a private school, where a lot of the rugby was taught; and if your rugby master happened to be on the selection committee, then that might work in your favour ... There were certainly elements like that.

Uttley also mentioned the opinion of another former England player, who ‘would always say that the independent schools had far too much clout in what was going on in schoolboy representative rugby. And he wouldn’t be far wrong in that.’ Uttley is well placed to assess this subject. Not only did he attend both a secondary modern school and a grammar school, but he spent the majority of his working life teaching physical education, including twenty-six years as a PE teacher and Master in Charge of Rugby at Harrow.<sup>21</sup>

Gary Pearce is another former secondary modern pupil who went on to play for England, representing his country thirty-six times between 1979 and 1991. Having failed the eleven-plus, he attended Mandeville County Secondary School from 1967 to 1974, and like Uttley, it was there that he first played rugby. His account of playing in an England Under-18 trial backs up Uttley’s assessment of representative school rugby:

[It was] pretty daunting really, because you knew at the time you were a seventeen-year-old, being taken away, and you knew there were these big names. Most of the players who were on the team trial sheet, they were from the public schools and grammar schools, so there was always a feeling of: ‘hang on a minute, am I in the right place?’ ... I think there was a slight bias towards [the public and grammar schools] ... Some of these big rugby-playing schools, [it is known] what sort of player you are before you get there. Whereas for me, coming from Mandeville

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<sup>21</sup> Roger Uttley, interview, 24 June 2015.



County School – ‘who the hell is he?’ You’ve got to really shine on the field to make sure you stand out.<sup>22</sup>

Rory Underwood, who won eighty-five caps between 1984 and 1996, also believed there was a lack of meritocracy in the schoolboy representative system. Like another former England winger mentioned in this thesis, Tom Danby, Underwood was educated at Barnard Castle School (a private school). He played schoolboy county rugby for Durham in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and stated of representative school rugby that ‘it is very much by word of mouth.’ He believed that ‘nepotism’ played a large part in selection for representative teams, commenting that selectors would often pick players from their own schools.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that more state schools were starting to play the game, it was clear, therefore, that schoolboy rugby in the 1960s and 1970s was still built around its traditional base – the private and grammar schools. These were the schools where the sport was taken most seriously, played most regularly and where, consequently, standards were highest. Whereas rugby was usually an automatic part of a grammar or private school education, and there would be staff on hand to run it (such as Uttley in his role at Harrow), at state schools provision depended more upon the personal enthusiasm of staff at the school. As Pearce stated, ‘it depended on what sort of teachers you had ... and if they were interested in playing rugby ... luckily for me we had a couple of teachers that were very interested.’ In discussing his own secondary modern education, Roger Uttley mentioned a teacher named Bryn Jones, ‘a scrum-half who played a bit for Fylde’, as one such member of staff. Similarly, Nigel Horton – an England international between 1969 and 1980, who attended

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<sup>22</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Rory Underwood, interview, 27 January 2016 and 8 February 2016.

Wheeler's Lane Secondary Modern School in Birmingham in the 1960s – believed that his school played rugby 'purely ... because the head of PE was an ex-rugby player and Welsh'.<sup>24</sup> There was an extent to which, it seems, rugby union in state schools in this era relied upon elements of happenstance such as these.

Furthermore, rugby was usually a more integral part of wider school life at private and grammar schools than it was at state schools. Rory Underwood recalled that at Barnard Castle, 'lots of kids would come out and support the first XV when the games were on'. He also knew of some private and grammar schools at which it was 'compulsory to go and watch the first XV when they were playing' – much like the previously quoted example given by Richard Sharp of his school in the 1950s. As noted in the previous chapter, rugby union was usually the main winter sport at schools like these. This was recalled by David Duckham (who was two years above Peter Rossborough at King Henry VIII school in Coventry, and would go on to play for England between 1969 and 1976), who said: 'The game, that sport, was the main winter sport played at school ... rugby was important to the school, it had a history of success.'<sup>25</sup>

School rugby fixtures remained largely based on status, too. It was noted in the previous chapter that private and grammar schools usually did not play against non-selective state schools in the immediate post-war years, and this remained the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Rory Underwood's school fixture list was an example of this:

We played in the usual northern circuit so we [went] as [far] south as St Peter's York, Pocklington, Ampleforth; round to Giggleswick, Sedbergh; over to the west

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<sup>24</sup> Pearce, interview; Uttley, interview; Nigel Horton, interview, 4 February 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Duckham, interview. This was, indeed, a particularly successful period for the school. On three occasions in the mid-1970s, the England team contained three King Henry VIII alumni – Peter Rossborough at full-back, David Duckham on the wing, and Peter Preece at centre.

would be Whitehaven ... and then you'd be up to Newcastle, so it'd be RGS Newcastle, Dame Allan's.<sup>26</sup>

The schools listed include five private schools (St Peter's School, Ampleforth College, Giggleswick School, Sedbergh School and RGS Newcastle), one grammar school (Whitehaven Grammar School) and two direct grant schools (Pocklington School and Dame Allan's Boys' School – both of which became private when the direct grant was abolished in 1975).<sup>27</sup> As Peter Rossborough put it of his experience playing for a direct grant school in the 1960s, such schools would generally play against 'schools similar to [their] own'.<sup>28</sup>

There would, it should be said, occasionally be fixtures between selective and non-selective schools. At Mandeville County Secondary School, the secondary modern attended by Gary Pearce, pupils 'would play football one term, and then there'd be a term of rugby.' He recalled the following:

[Rugby] wasn't played at any great level. We'd play ... against local secondary sides, and the big game of the year if you like – we played only three or four – would be against Aylesbury Grammar School. That was always a big game because they had regular rugby and had a very good side. And we would normally get stuffed.<sup>29</sup>

Occasionally, too, the lesser school would triumph. At Roger Uttley's Montgomery Secondary Modern School, a similar annual rivalry existed with Blackpool Grammar School (where Uttley would move for sixth form and become head boy). 'We'd always been beaten going up through the year groups,' he recalled. 'But in our final year, in our fifth year, we

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<sup>26</sup> Underwood, interview.

<sup>27</sup> HC Deb 26 January 1976, Vol 904, cols 52-5W

<sup>28</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>29</sup> Pearce, interview.

beat them, which was great.<sup>30</sup> Overall, though, despite occurrences like these, school fixtures remained a largely closed shop, based – within geographical areas – around the de facto educational hierarchy. More non-selective schools may have been taking up the sport, but the real rugby-playing strength remained within private and grammar schools.

This, once more, was reflected in the educational background of the England team. Much like it had been in previous decades, throughout the 1960s and 1970s the national side was dominated by players who had been educated at private and grammar schools. Secondary school details could be found for 170 of the 175 players who made their England debuts between 1960 and 1979. Eighty-four per cent attended a private or grammar school – 41 per cent for private schools, and 43 per cent for grammar schools. Only 29 of the 170 players – 17 per cent – had attended a non-selective school. Once again, as they were in the previous chapter, these figures are most striking when compared with those for the population as a whole. In 1965, only 8 per cent of pupils in all schools in England and Wales attended a private school – a figure that dropped slightly to 6 per cent by 1980. These figures pale in comparison to the 41 per cent mentioned above. When looking at grammar schools, 25 per cent of all public sector school pupils in England attended such schools in 1965-66. Due to comprehensivisation, this dropped drastically to just 3 per cent by 1980-81. The grammar-school proportion of England rugby internationals in this period (43 per cent) was therefore, like the private school proportion, much higher than that of the population in general.<sup>31</sup>

Examining the figures further, the main change from the period 1947-59 in the educational background of the England team was an increase in players who had attended

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<sup>30</sup> Uttley, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix Two; Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 199.

grammar schools (from 29 per cent to 43 per cent), and a roughly equivalent decrease in those who had been privately educated (from 60 per cent to 41 per cent).<sup>32</sup> This reflected both the steady increase in the number of pupils at grammar schools between the Butler Act and Circular 10/65 (in England and Wales, this number increased from 488,931 in 1946 to a peak of 726,075 in 1964), and also the increase, noted in the previous chapter, of grammar schools taking up rugby.<sup>33</sup> Both of these trends were now beginning to have a marked effect on the composition of the national team, as players schooled in the 1950s and late 1940s reached adulthood.<sup>34</sup>

There was, in this period, a slight increase in the proportion of state-schooled England players. Between 1947 and 1959, 11 per cent of England players making their debuts had attended non-selective state schools. Between 1960 and 1969, this figure climbed to 16 per cent, and between 1970 and 1979, it climbed again slightly to 19 per cent.<sup>35</sup> This does perhaps reflect an increase in participation at state schools, but it is only a marginal change. There are two contributing factors to this lack of a significant change. Firstly, the aforementioned discrepancy in organisational and rugby-playing strength between selective and non-selective schools meant that a simple increase in participation among the latter did not have a proportional effect on the composition of the national team. The best rugby, and the best coaching, was still largely taking place at private and grammar schools, and state schools had little hope of breaking into those circles. The gap between the two was therefore maintained. Secondly, there perhaps had not quite been time yet for the full effects of increased state school participation to be felt at the national team level. A better testing ground for this is the 1980s and early 1990s, in which there was

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix Two.

<sup>33</sup> Simon, *Education*, 583.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix Two.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

indeed a more significant increase in the proportion of state school-educated England players.<sup>36</sup> The extent, though, to which this was simply down to the sharp decline in the number of grammar schools in the country, as opposed to a genuine democratisation of the game, will be covered in the next chapter.

Moving on from schools, the 1960s in particular were a period of great change in another area – higher education. This sector had begun to expand in the late 1950s, but did so at a much greater pace throughout the following decade, continuing into the 1970s. One of the chief engines of this higher education boom was the Robbins Report, published in 1963. Following the growth of the late 1950s, an enquiry had been set up in 1960 ‘to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and ... advise ... on what principles its long-term development should be based.’<sup>37</sup> The resulting report made several recommendations around the structure, planning and financing of higher education, but as Brian Simon has put it, ‘Central to the whole thrust of the report ... was legitimisation of a policy of massive expansion across the whole field of higher education.’<sup>38</sup> This was in keeping with the report’s guiding axiom: ‘that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.’<sup>39</sup>

While the number of university students in Britain had already begun to increase in the late 1950s, the report sparked a significant jump in the mid-1960s. Between 1950 and 1955, the number of university students in the UK had hovered around the 85,000 mark, increasing to 104,000 by the end of the decade. By 1969, that figure had more than

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Committee on Higher Education, ‘Higher Education’, I (London: HMSO, 1963), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Simon, *Education*, 234.

<sup>39</sup> Committee on Higher Education, ‘Higher Education’, 1963, 8.

doubled, reaching 219,000. Student numbers continued to increase in the 1970s (though at a slightly more gentle pace) – by 1978, 288,000 students were enrolled at universities in the UK.<sup>40</sup> These increases were partly driven by the creation of new universities, as well as the conversion of other forms of higher education institution, such as Colleges of Advanced Technology, into university institutions.

It was noted in the previous chapter that an increase in numbers of university students in the 1940s and 1950s was not necessarily matched by an expansion across class boundaries. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was again the middle classes who benefited most from the increase in university places. A.H. Halsey's study, from which the figures in Chapter Two were taken, is once more illuminating on the subject. As outlined previously, Halsey et al. organised their results by birth cohort. From the cohort born between 1923 and 1932 (who reached university age between 1941 and 1950) to the cohort born 1943-52 (reaching university age between 1961 and 1970), the percentage of working-class students attending university increased by 2 per cent. In the same period, those from the service class saw a much greater increase of 11 per cent. This represents a shortening of the disparity between the two classes compared with the immediate post-war years, but still shows that the higher classes were benefitting more from the expansion of educational opportunity. Across the whole period studied by Halsey (those reaching eighteen between 1931 and 1940 to those reaching eighteen between 1961 and 1970), the percentage of working-class students attending university increased by 2 per cent, while the service-class increase was 19 per cent. Even in a period of greater expansion of higher education, then,

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<sup>40</sup> Simon, *Education*, 597.

the picture remains largely the same as it was immediately after the war; once again, ‘the greatest absolute increments of opportunity go to the service class’.<sup>41</sup>

If this was the picture across higher education as a whole, what changes did university rugby go through? In the years immediately after the war, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it had been dominated by Oxford and Cambridge. As the 1960s progressed, however, things began to change. The importance of sport at Oxbridge gradually waned as the universities began to shift their focus further towards academic pursuits. Students and dons alike ‘reacted against the public-school worship of organized games’, and in an increasingly professionalised sporting world, Oxbridge’s sportsmen were not the stars they once were.<sup>42</sup> At Oxford, the Norrington Table – an annual ranking of colleges based on examination results – was introduced in 1964, providing further motivation for colleges to seek out the brightest students, as opposed to those who would shine on the playing fields.<sup>43</sup> As Christopher Brooke put it in *A History of the University of Cambridge*, ‘with an increased concern for examinations and their results has gone an almost inevitable decline in sport.’<sup>44</sup>

Against this background, the elite position of Oxbridge rugby declined. The *Centenary History of Oxford University Rugby Football Club*, published in 1969, says of its time that ‘the winning of a Blue no longer carries with it the prestige that it did in the past’, while Wallace Reyburn, in his *Story of English Rugby* published in 1975, wrote of the ‘great pity that a fixture such as the Varsity Match ... should so sadly dwindle in significance and public interest.’ Furthermore, commented Oxford’s *Centenary History*, ‘the men who have

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<sup>41</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 188.

<sup>42</sup> Wenden, ‘Sport’, 519.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher N.L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge Volume IV: 1870-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 517.



the desire to win a Blue are themselves under pressure from tutors and others to devote more of their time to their work.<sup>45</sup> Even in the late 1950s, this had begun to be the case. John Young, who, as noted in the previous chapter, felt that rugby had helped him win a place at Oxford, found that it did not necessarily allow him to avoid his work:

I occasionally got a bit of hard stuff from my law tutor; that ‘it’s all very well saying you couldn’t do your law essay because you’ve had to go up to London to play for the university team against Wasps or something – but it is not good enough’ ... Tutors in those days – and I think certainly David Yardley, my tutor – was anxious that I organised my life so that I would give adequate time to the need for study, and not give it away to sport and socialising.<sup>46</sup>

Rugby remained an important pursuit at Oxford and Cambridge, but from the late 1950s onwards it did not hold quite the elevated position that it had prior to, and just after, the Second World War. Indeed, Chris Laidlaw – a New Zealand international who, as a Rhodes scholar, captained Oxford in the 1969-70 season – was so struck by the decline in rugby at Oxford that he concluded that ‘organised sport has but a few years of life left there.’<sup>47</sup>

In 1962, Oxford joined the newly created British Universities Sports Federation, perhaps signalling an acceptance that it no longer necessarily operated on a higher sporting plane than other universities (it still was not, however, part of the Universities Athletic Union, which had organised the main inter-university rugby union competition since 1930).<sup>48</sup> With regards to rugby, other universities began to come to the fore in the post-war era as higher education expanded. Ray French, for example, described Leeds University in

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<sup>45</sup> McWhirter and Noble, *Centenary History of OURFC*, 196; Wallace Reyburn, *The Men in White: The Story of English Rugby* (London: Pelham, 1975), 57.

<sup>46</sup> Young, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Laidlaw, *Mud in Your Eye: A Worm’s Eye View of the Changing World of Rugby* (London: Pelham, 1973), 162.

<sup>48</sup> Wenden, ‘Sport’, 533.

the early 1960s as a 'big rugby university', saying that rugby union was 'the major sport' there and there was 'great meaning attached' to it.<sup>49</sup> The sport was also taken seriously at Loughborough Colleges, which began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s as a powerhouse of university rugby. In 1959, Loughborough won the Middlesex Sevens competition for the first time, and by the mid-1960s, as Collins has stated, Loughborough 'not only dominated the Universities Athletic Union ... competition but could also boast a first-class fixture list that included Leicester, Gloucester, Rosslyn Park and London Irish.'<sup>50</sup> Colin McFadyean trained as a teacher at Loughborough in the early 1960s, before going on to represent England eleven times between 1966 and 1968. He recalled the calibre of the teams he played in at Loughborough:

In the years that I was at Loughborough, I was capped; Gerald Davies was one year behind me, and he was capped; Dave Rollitt was there, and he was capped; John Mantle was there, and he was capped for Wales; it goes on and on. There were about eight people who became rugby internationals.<sup>51</sup>

Loughborough, indeed, were at the forefront of coaching in the sport. McFadyean and those he names were coached by John Robins, who would also later coach McFadyean on the 1966 British Lions tour to Australia and New Zealand. McFadyean described the approach towards rugby at Loughborough as 'very professional' (much more so, in fact, than when he played for England, whose outlook he described as 'so terribly amateur'). 'They called us "the pros",' he recalled; 'The other colleges said "you're professionals".'<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Peter Rossborough recalled that at Durham University, where he was a student in the late 1960s, there was a 'very strong rugby team' which 'trained very hard' and were

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<sup>49</sup> French, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 187.

<sup>51</sup> Colin McFadyean, interview, 28 January 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

‘serious’ about winning – an atmosphere he likened to the successful Coventry team he was part of. Rossborough was one of three Durham-educated players who made their debuts in 1971 (the others being Charlie Hannaford and Peter Dixon).<sup>53</sup> It was, therefore, no longer Oxford and Cambridge who were necessarily leading the way in their commitment to rugby success. Furthermore, university rugby appears to have been at the vanguard of an increasingly professional outlook within the game as a whole.

As higher education expanded, then, so too did the number of universities producing top-class rugby union players. A combination of a greater number of young men going to university and a decline in the importance of sport at Oxbridge meant that the higher education backgrounds of England players became a little more diverse in this period. Between 1947 and 1959, 36 per cent of England debutants were either current or former Oxbridge students – by the 1970s, this had fallen to 17 per cent. At the same time, just 14 per cent of debutants between 1947 and 1959 had been to a university or college other than Oxford or Cambridge; this increased to 32 per cent in the 1960s, and to 39 per cent in the 1970s.<sup>54</sup> It therefore became more common than it had been previously to see the likes of Loughborough and Durham, as well as a number of other universities and colleges, in the biographies of England players.

Given that, as suggested above, little changed in this era in terms of the class composition of Britain’s student body, it is no surprise that, among the expansion in higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, rugby union survived and even thrived. The majority of students taking up new university places were of the middle classes. The Robbins Report stated that in 1961, only 25 per cent of undergraduates in Britain were from working-class

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<sup>53</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Figures derived from the biographies in Farmer et al., *English Rugby*.

backgrounds – barely an increase on the 23 per cent given for the period 1928-47.<sup>55</sup> By 1979, the Universities Central Council on Admissions (who started collecting such data in 1977) suggested that little had changed, putting the figure at 24 per cent.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, 91 per cent of university students from Halsey's overall sample for *Origins and Destinations* had attended either a private, direct grant or grammar school.<sup>57</sup> Given that the sport was mainly played in such schools, and by the middle classes, there was therefore unlikely to have been a shortage of rugby union players enrolling at universities in the 1960s and 1970s, and consequently the strength of the sport spread as higher education expanded.

Just as it had done in previous decades, rugby talent could still help a prospective student win a place at a university or college. Don Rutherford, who had left school before reaching sixth form, was surprised to find that no interview was required when he wrote to the Principal of St Luke's College, Exeter, to apply for a place to train as a teacher. Rutherford 'had played for England by then, and that was it, he [the Principal] was quite happy with that.'<sup>58</sup> When it came to applying to Loughborough Colleges, Colin McFadyean suggested that 'if it was your first choice, and you had three A-levels, and a recommendation from your PE man who used to go there, it was, yeah – straight through really.'<sup>59</sup> In the late 1960s, Roger Uttley won a place at Northumberland College of Education after finishing school. Answering a question about whether the 'Freemasonry of rugby', as he called it, helped him win a place at the college, he said: 'Oh certainly my sporting ability did, yeah; having been an England international – schoolboy international –

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<sup>55</sup> Committee on Higher Education, 'Higher Education', II-I (London: HMSO, 1963), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Bolton, 'Higher Education and Social Class' (London: House of Commons, 2010), 11.

<sup>57</sup> Halsey, Heath, and Ridge, *Origins*, 180.

<sup>58</sup> Rutherford, interview.

<sup>59</sup> McFadyean, interview.

certainly helped and gave me a little bit of standing, I'm sure'. The fact that his headmaster at Blackpool Grammar School had a connection at the college also helped:

The head man at the grammar school then was a chap called Jim Brookes who had connections in the north east, and because I was head boy, I think he thought 'Christ, we better do something to get this lad off our hands and away.' And as luck would have it ... he knew the Principal, or somebody, at Northumberland College of Education.

It had not all been plain sailing for Uttley, though. His first choice had been Cardiff College of Education, which had its own sporting connections. 'The great Lynn Davies [an Olympic gold-winning athlete] was on the staff at the college at the time, and [Welsh rugby union international] Gareth Edwards' former tutor was also there', recalled Uttley. He travelled to Cardiff for an interview, and 'thought [he'd] done quite well', but received a letter a few days later saying the college could not offer him a place. By his own admission, Uttley's O-level results 'hadn't been great'. Being a talented sportsman did not, then, necessarily mean a free pass into college or university.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, rugby within schools, colleges and universities did go through a certain amount of change in the 1960s and 1970s, but it did so within the confines of its existing framework. The game was played in more non-selective schools than it had been before, with the introduction of comprehensivisation in this period a contributing factor. Furthermore, at the level of higher education, rugby mirrored, to a certain extent, a wider sense of democratisation – the old guard of Oxford and Cambridge were no longer the automatic superpowers of university rugby, as other institutions came to the fore. The sport, however, still retained its traditional power base, especially in schools. In a section of

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<sup>60</sup> Uttley, interview.

its report entitled ‘Who gets to the top?’, the Royal Commission on Public Schools reported in 1968 that, among other categories, 82 per cent of the ‘directors of prominent firms’, 42 per cent of the Labour cabinet and 88 per cent of judges and QCs were educated at private and direct grant schools. This was despite the fact that only 7 per cent of fourteen-year-olds attended such schools in 1967.<sup>61</sup> Those involved in top-level English rugby union also came disproportionately from the top of the educational pyramid. By 1980, 6 per cent of all school pupils in England and Wales were at a private school; of the twenty players that took the field during England’s Five Nations championship triumph that year, eight – 40 per cent – had been privately educated (while a further eight had been to grammar schools).<sup>62</sup> Rugby union remained among those English institutions that were still dominated by the well-educated.

## Class

Everybody used to think that ... rugby was a middle-class game, but I managed it as a secondary modern boy, back in the sixties.

*Roger Uttley, interview.*

Rugby in those days was, I suppose, very middle-class.

*Nigel Horton, interview.*

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<sup>61</sup> Public Schools Commission, ‘The Public Schools Commission: First Report’, Volume 2 (London: HMSO, 1968), 236.

<sup>62</sup> Bolton, ‘Education’, 17; Appendix Two.

These conflicting quotations would seem to indicate that, in the 1960s and 1970s, tension between change and continuity was evident when it came to rugby union and class. In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that, despite the existence of a self-image that stressed equality, rugby union in the 1940s and 1950s was predominantly a middle-class sport. Did the game become more open and more inclusive in the following two decades or did it, as Horton stated, remain ‘very middle-class’?<sup>63</sup> The picture is once again obscured by rugby’s self-image, but on analysis becomes clear. By the end of the 1970s, the sport still belonged to the middle classes, and any change that did take place did so within that pre-existing framework.

It was noted in the previous chapter that in the immediate post-war years, despite a belief that ‘the people’s war’ had broken down social barriers, social gradation remained a prominent part of English life. In the 1960s and 1970s, class did become a little harder to define, and boundaries became a little more blurred. ‘With the spread of affluence, the decline of domestic service and deference and, to a lesser extent, the growth of educational opportunity,’ wrote Harold Perkin, ‘the classes were becoming more alike in ... lifestyle generally.’<sup>64</sup> Ideas of classlessness were linked to the concept of a sixties ‘cultural transformation’, to use Arthur Marwick’s phrase.<sup>65</sup> Dominic Sandbrook notes that in the 1960s, ‘no self-respecting newspaper had failed to enthuse about the classless Britain spearheaded by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones,’ while Marwick writes that ‘it became fashionable to speak of the cultural ambience of the 1960s as “classless”’.<sup>66</sup> Harold Wilson, prime minister for much of this period, was a particular exponent of the idea that class

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<sup>63</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 420.

<sup>65</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 801.

<sup>66</sup> Sandbrook, *State of Emergency*, 32; Marwick, *British Society*, 124.

boundaries were dissolving. Sandbrook writes that ‘he cultivated an appearance of classless professionalism’:

Asked which class he belonged to, he replied ‘Well someone who started at elementary school in Yorkshire and became an Oxford don – where do you put him in this class spectrum? I think these phrases are becoming more and more meaningless.’<sup>67</sup>

In fact, though, for many, the language of class was as meaningful as ever. In 1963, Michael Kahan, David Butler and Donald Stokes conducted research on ‘the accepted measures of class’ in Britain, asking subjects to ‘volunteer what class they belonged to’. Ninety-nine per cent of their sample placed themselves in one of the traditional class categories (29 per cent of the sample said ‘middle’ class and 67 per cent said ‘working’ class).<sup>68</sup> In 1972, a survey by National Opinion Polls found that 91 per cent believed in the existence of social classes.<sup>69</sup> Of the 1960s, Arthur Marwick notes that ‘there was no economic revolution, no political revolution, no advent of the proletariat to power, no classless society’.<sup>70</sup> Instead, he wrote, there is ‘overwhelming evidence’ that Britain in this period was divided ‘into broad aggregates of individuals and families, these aggregates being distinguished from each other by inequalities in wealth, income, power (or at least access to it), authority, prestige, freedom, lifestyles, and life chances, including prospects of mobility into a different aggregate of individuals and families.’<sup>71</sup> Sandbrook suggests the same of the 1970s, arguing that ‘British politics and culture in the 1970s were saturated in class-consciousness.’<sup>72</sup> Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne’s study into class and social

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<sup>67</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Kahan, David Butler, and Donald Stokes, ‘On the Analytical Division of Social Class’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 2 (1966): 122–24.

<sup>69</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 455.

<sup>70</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 805.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 272–73.

<sup>72</sup> Sandbrook, *State of Emergency*, 32.



mobility in Britain, based on inquiries made in the early 1970s and published in 1980, led its authors ‘clearly to the conclusion that, despite these supposedly propitious circumstances’ – by which they mean a growing economy and an increase in educational provision – ‘no significant reduction in class inequalities has in fact been achieved.’<sup>73</sup> The 1960s and 1970s may have been a time of social change, then, but class divisions – both in perception and reality – remained.

In this environment, rugby union remained a middle-class sport, and provided evidence that the language and realities of class were still present. In order to explore this, it is worth beginning by looking again at the composition of the England team in this period in terms of educational background and occupation. It was noted earlier in this chapter that, between 1960 and 1979, 41 per cent of England internationals making their debuts had attended a private school, and 43 per cent had attended a grammar school. This total figure of 84 per cent had dropped slightly from the 89 per cent recorded between 1947 and 1959, but still represented an overwhelming majority.<sup>74</sup> In terms of occupation, it was noted in the previous chapter that, according to the figures in Tony Collins’ *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, the majority of England internationals between 1946 and 1970 had what might be termed ‘middle-class’ jobs. In this period, there were fifty-three teachers, twenty-six company directors or partners, twenty-two salesmen, eleven doctors, five civil engineers, four army officers, three bankers, three civil servants and one actuary, to name only a handful of the middle-class job categories listed. Only 22 of the total of 219 players listed had jobs that could be categorised as ‘working-class’ (that is, they held manual occupations). Twelve of these players, furthermore, were farmers – a particularly

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<sup>73</sup> John H. Goldthorpe, Catriona Llewellyn, and Clive Payne, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 252.

<sup>74</sup> Appendix Two.

ambiguous occupation when it comes to social class.<sup>75</sup> The percentage of players who were working-class by occupation, then, was 10 per cent (if not less). Comparing this with the 55 per cent of the British workforce as a whole who had manual jobs in 1971 demonstrates that top-level rugby union remained disproportionately middle-class.<sup>76</sup>

Looking within the sport, at club level, rugby continued to be played throughout this period on a ‘friendly’ basis. No official league competition existed (as is explored in Chapter Four, this was eventually established in the late 1980s), and therefore clubs – much like schools – organised their own fixture lists. Unofficial ‘merit tables’ run by the *Daily Telegraph* had existed since the early 1960s, but these did not compel clubs to play one another in a structured manner as an official league would. Rugby clubs’ fixture lists – again, like those of schools – were a mixture of different considerations: geography and playing strength were the main determining factors. Some, however, also felt that social status played a part. Colin McFadyean, of Moseley and England, commented that ‘Harlequins wouldn’t give Moseley a game. Just out of snobbery basically.’<sup>77</sup> Nigel Horton, who also played for Moseley, suggested the same thing:

Strangely enough we never played Harlequins ... They were a very snobbish club. Probably thought, ‘Oh, we’re not going to play Moseley.’ And it never happened. The only time we played teams like that was in the cups that started off ... So we never played Harlequins, but all the other clubs, yes.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to this, Malcolm Phillips remains puzzled as to why, despite playing the rest of England and Wales’ strongest sides, Oxford University did not play against Coventry (two

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<sup>75</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

<sup>76</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>77</sup> McFadyean, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Horton, interview.

rugby teams at very opposite ends of rugby's class spectrum).<sup>79</sup> John Pullin, a Bristol farmer, while not discussing fixture organisation as such, also saw regional and class-related differences between club teams:

The London people, they were a bit different – well they thought they were ... [T]hey were all white-collar workers basically. Not that I didn't get on well with them, they were quite a good bunch of fellas. Because playing rugby, you had vicars, lawyers, dustmen, everything. A good cross-section ... but London, yeah they were a bit elite – they thought they were.<sup>80</sup>

While these testimonies do not add up to concrete evidence of class bias and division within club rugby, they do hint at the possibility of it. Certainly, had fixtures been organised purely on merit, Harlequins would have played Moseley, and Oxford would have played Coventry. What is more, though – and as is the case with oral evidence generally – the fact that players such as Horton, McFadyean and Pullin *believed* (and still believe) this snobbery existed is informative in and of itself. It demonstrates, as noted in the previous chapter in the discussion of Cannadine's dictum regarding the prevalence of the language of class in British society, that ideas of class were bound up within the sport.

Despite this evidence of internal gradation within rugby union, there was hardly any danger of the sport collapsing into class warfare. As noted in the previous chapter, such gradations generally involved different types of *middle-class* person or institution. David Caplan, a dentist who played twice for England in 1978, played much of his club rugby at Headingley, one of the major clubs in the north of England. Interestingly, when asked

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<sup>79</sup> Phillips, interview.

<sup>80</sup> Pullin, interview.

about the types of people at the club, he began by reverting to rugby's aforementioned self-image – before correcting himself:

*Interviewer:* What about the sorts of people who you played with at Headingley, what types of walks of life were they from?

*DC:* Everything – er, when I say everything – no, I suppose they're not everything. Teachers, doctors, dentists, architects, insurance brokers – that kind of thing.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, as opposed to doing 'all sorts of jobs', rugby players – in general – did all sorts of *middle-class* jobs.

Few top-level rugby clubs, therefore, were genuinely working-class. Coventry was one club that could claim to be so, as analysis in the previous chapter indicates, but even their team contained a number of middle-class players – or, indeed, players who would be deemed working-class within rugby union, but whose occupational status was actually more ambiguous. Phil Judd was one example. He undoubtedly came from a working-class family background, and began his working life in a manual trade, but while he was still playing rugby he became the owner of an engineering firm, which he continued to run until retirement.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, players like Peter Rossborough (a teacher), David Duckham (an employee at Barclay's Bank) blurred the lines between lower-class family backgrounds and middle-class schooling or occupation.<sup>83</sup>

Rugby, in this way, reflected a continuing change in society – the broadening of, and increased variation within, the middle classes. Arthur Marwick has pointed out that even as the Second World War began, it was difficult to speak of a single middle class. The

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<sup>81</sup> David Caplan, interview, 29 October 2015.

<sup>82</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Rossborough, interview; Duckham, interview.

middle classes were ‘relatively amorphous and highly variegated’, and this trend – as noted in the previous chapter – increased as this section of society expanded.<sup>84</sup> The expansion of the 1940s and 1950s continued into the 1960s and 1970s, as manual jobs continued to make way for white-collar service jobs. Whereas 36 per cent of the British workforce worked in non-manual jobs in 1951, by 1971 the figure had increased to 45 per cent.<sup>85</sup> In terms of self-assigned class status, 42 per cent of respondents to a major study in the early 1980s placed themselves in the middle-class category (from an ‘objective’ point of view, 52 per cent in fact had occupations which placed them in the top three of the Registrar General’s class categories).<sup>86</sup> Rugby union continued to reflect this varied middle class, as the examples in the previous paragraph and the list of job types noted from Collins’ book show.<sup>87</sup>

The culture of rugby union tended to reflect its domination by the middle classes, and this was most amplified when it came to playing for England. Much has been made over the years of the distinctly middle-class composition of the Twickenham crowd, for example – something that Mike Burton, an England international between 1972 and 1978, commented on in his 1982 autobiography. Discussing his debut for England, against Wales at Twickenham, he wrote:

We arrived at Twickenham ... As the coach stopped and I stepped down, I saw a lone Welshman standing across the way from me ... ‘Mike. ’Aven’t got a spare ticket, ’ave yew?’ The England accents reached me too. ‘Come on now, Burton, have a good match’, and so on. I couldn’t help the Welshman with a ticket, but I couldn’t help feeling sorry for him, and identifying with him too. He was working-class and his Twickenham trip had probably divested him of his life savings. He

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<sup>84</sup> Marwick, ‘Class’, 80.

<sup>85</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>86</sup> Gordon Marshall et al., *Social Class in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 144; *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

was probably a fanatic who supported the game week in, week out. Despite his red woolly hat and his Welsh accent, despite his cheek in asking an England player to help him go in and support Wales, I felt that I had more in common with him than with many of the English people in the crowd.<sup>88</sup>

For the players, this type of atmosphere and culture was largely replicated in their social experiences with England – at least with official social engagements. After each match would come the post-match dinner, held at an upmarket London hotel. Peter Rossborough remembered that at such events there were ‘lots of congratulations handed out, lots of presentations made to referees and touch judges and that sort of thing.’<sup>89</sup> Each player would sit at a table with a member of the opposition and several ‘alickadoos’, as John Pullin recalled:

I think you had the round table, and there was you and your opposite number there, and I think the rest of the table was mainly committee men, who were up there on their perks, free trip and all the rest of it, on expenses – a good beer-up.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed Budge Rogers – a former record cap-holder and England captain who by the early 1980s was England’s chairman of selectors – remembered battling to keep this traditional set-up in place:

The pattern was, had been forever, at the post-match dinner, the players were split up and two – one from each side – would go to each table. There were 400 people or so at the dinner, and most of those were rugby people from the game at large – running community rugby, running junior clubs. And the players started saying ‘Why can’t we all sit together?’ I used to say ‘No, you have the whole bloody weekend together, you’ve got plenty of time after the dinner, just for that little

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<sup>88</sup> Mike Burton, *Never Stay Down: An Autobiography* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1982), 40.

<sup>89</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Pullin, interview.

occasion – it makes those people’s evening. You’re staying like that.’ In fact after I went, it moved – they let them have their own table.<sup>91</sup>

Wherever the players sat, the evenings certainly appear to have had a distinct air of middle-class social structure about them – upmarket venues, seating plans, speeches. Such occasions were rooted in the middle-class sociability of Victorian gentlemen’s clubs, where ‘time-honoured rituals, such as dinners and archaic toasts’ were ‘a means of asserting a male esprit de corps’ and ‘were seen as embodying [the institution’s] unique character.’<sup>92</sup> As Budge Rogers said, the pattern was as it ‘had been forever’. The dress code – black tie – was a typical example of the considered formality of the event. David Caplan remembered the particular importance attached to this, as he recalled a telephone conversation with Twickenham to tell him he had been picked for his England debut after a last-minute injury to his rival for the full-back position:

[T]hey said ‘Oh yeah, we’ve just spoken to them at Murrayfield and he’s not fit to play, so can you get there in time?’ And I went ‘Yeah, of course I can get there in time.’ And they went ‘The most important thing you’ve got to remember is you must take a DJ [dinner jacket], because after the [match], the dinner is DJ ... It’s essential that you wear a DJ.’ You know, it wasn’t like ‘make sure you bring your boots’ or ‘make sure you bring your shirt’.<sup>93</sup>

With rituals such as these, rugby union often played a part in equipping young men with the social attitudes and skills of the middle classes. Indeed, some players talk about the sport as a form of social education. Peter Ford, for example, recalled the fact that his first

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<sup>91</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 91. Much of the business of English, and indeed international, rugby union continued to be conducted in such a gentleman’s club – the East India Club in London – throughout this period. Micky Steele-Bodger, one of the interviewees for this study, was the club’s president at the time of interview (and the interview took place there).

<sup>93</sup> Caplan, interview.

visit to a hotel was because of rugby. ‘When I went away with Gloucester,’ he said, ‘we’d stop for lunch at a hotel on the way to the match perhaps, and I’d never been to a hotel before; and I walked in, and ‘what do I do?’ kind-of-thing ... I was almost shaking.’ Ford viewed his involvement in rugby over the years as ‘a big education; going to places, going into hotels, travelling to places. I played for England in 1964’, he remembered, ‘and I’d never had a passport. I had to go and get a temporary passport to go to France.’<sup>94</sup> Ted Woodward sums up the effect of rugby on his social life by saying that ‘your whole field of everything is opened ... It makes you ... a little bit more confident in yourself ... You can go into a room and you can talk to anybody.’<sup>95</sup> Ray French – who, like Ford, was from a working-class background – particularly remembered a meal he had before his first England trial match in December 1960:

There were about forty players. And we all had dinner, together! This is an England trial the next day! We all had dinner, you know, massive five, six-course dinner, it was like a party ... And again, talking about culture, we had lobster thermidor. I had never seen lobster in my life. I mean, you didn’t get many lobsters in St Helens in the 1950s. There was fish and chips at Howard’s chippy up next to Saints, but there was no lobster thermidor. Anyway this lobster came on the plate and I’m looking at it and I think – ‘how the hell do I eat this? What do I do?’ ... And, you know, that was the difference in the culture. A lot of these lads had come from independent school and they’d, you know, they were in this sort of background. I’d never seen a lobster on a plate in my life.<sup>96</sup>

Though it is a comical situation, and perhaps an extreme example, this episode does clearly illustrate the phenomenon being described. Rugby union operated in the world of the middle classes, and much of its social culture reflected this class background. Those

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<sup>94</sup> Ford, interview.

<sup>95</sup> Woodward, interview.

<sup>96</sup> French, interview.



who came to it from different backgrounds absorbed these attitudes, and for those who had already been brought up in such a culture, rugby union was part of the make-up of their middle-class identity. Furthermore, this culture of middle-class sociability was, as previously stated, most pronounced at international level – Colin McFadyean perhaps summed this up most succinctly when he said: ‘I had never drunk gin and tonic till I played for England.’<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, to digress temporarily from the issue of class, English rugby union’s culture of sociability was also thoroughly male. Rugby’s social culture was, as Tony Collins has observed, ‘consciously and explicitly an entirely masculine domain, an arena where men could socialise without the presence of women, a realm in which they could drink heavily, sing obscene songs and indulge in what were euphemistically known as “high jinks” and “horseplay”’.<sup>98</sup> Thus Colin McFadyean recalled the ‘macho’ nature of ‘a very heavy culture of drinking after games’, including the singing of ‘sexist’ songs, and Gary Pearce commented that ‘there was so much drunk, on tours and after games, if you didn’t drink – I don’t know, it must have been a difficult time.’<sup>99</sup> Despite the fact that players’ wives would often travel to watch their husbands play for England, and would stay with them overnight after the match in the team’s hotel, it was not until 1988 that they were invited to attend the post-match dinner.<sup>100</sup> Roger Uttley recalled, for example: ‘when our wives came down, their expenses weren’t paid. We had to pay their half of the room on the Saturday night when we were staying at the Hilton. And they dined separately.’ Jonathan Webb commented that wives ‘didn’t even exist as far as the RFU were concerned’.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> McFadyean, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 83.

<sup>99</sup> McFadyean, interview; Pearce, interview.

<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Webb, interview, 5 April 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Uttley, interview; Webb, interview.

This aspect of rugby union's social culture reflected the fact that, where women were involved in the sport in this period, it was usually in a background, supporting role.<sup>102</sup> In other words, as Collins has observed, 'The role of women in rugby was to provide for men: food, drink, washing and emotional support'.<sup>103</sup> In 1970, for example, outgoing RFU president Dudley Kemp thanked his wife in his speech to the annual general meeting 'for her encouragement and the way she accepted that my first love this year has again been rugby football'. Twenty-four years later at the same event, Dennis Easby, the incoming president, thanked the previous president's wife for supporting her husband and for her 'charm'.<sup>104</sup> Where women appear in the testimony of interviewees for this study, it is largely in recognition of this supporting role. Peter Rossborough, for example, recalled this with particular poignancy, noting the effect of his rugby career on his family:

I'd come home from work, go straight off to training, Sandra would be left with the two kids and so on, she would get them changed, put them to bed, feed them, all of that sort of stuff. So in a way I suppose – lots of people were like this – we were sort of absentee fathers, as it were. And certainly when I went into coaching and was away on tours as well, the kids would not see you for a month or more at a time. And whilst it was exciting for us, it must have been tough for our wives, at home looking after families on their own.<sup>105</sup>

Moving back to the topic of class, it was argued in the previous chapter that the hierarchical nature of English rugby reflected the layered society of which it was part. This sense of hierarchy, and certainly of the importance of tradition, remained in place in the 1960s and 1970s. It was noted in the previous chapter, for example, that RFU presidents of

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<sup>102</sup> Women did not, according to Tony Collins, begin to play rugby union seriously in England until the 1970s. The game 'progressed rapidly'; a Women's Rugby Football Union was formed by student teams in 1983, and the first women's World Cup took place in 1991. Despite this progress, though, women's rugby union continued to play 'an auxiliary role to the men's game' in this period. Collins, *Social History*, 94-95.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 10 July 1970, London; Minutes of the RFU AGM, 8 July 1994, London.

<sup>105</sup> Rossborough, interview.

the 1940s and 1950s largely retained similar characteristics to those that had gone before them. Many had been privately educated, had attended Oxbridge, had prosperous careers away from the game, and had reached a high level as rugby players themselves (often having been capped for England). This remained the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Micky Steele-Bodger was perhaps the archetype of this – his rugby life had begun at Rugby School, from where he had progressed to being captain of Cambridge, being capped for England, becoming an England selector and eventually being made chairman of selectors. He then moved on to the RFU committee as a representative of the Central Districts region, and described his progress from there:

Once I became a member of Central Districts, I was on the committee. And once you're on the committee you're eligible to be president ... I was asked to stand as junior vice-president, which was in '71 ... and then I followed through, you do one year junior vice-president, one year senior, and then president. And you just have one year ... in that we think we have enough ... good people to get through and do it.<sup>106</sup>

Whether 'good people' or not, there were certainly plenty of similar people available. Through this period, other presidents included Cyril Gadney (educated at Dragon School in Oxford; a former international referee and brother of England international Bernard Gadney), Dr Tom Kemp (educated at Denstone College, Cambridge University and St Mary's Hospital, and a former England captain), Dickie Jeeps (England and British Lions scrum-half of the 1950s and 1960s, educated at Bedford Modern School), and no fewer than three men with knighthoods: Sir Lawrie Edwards, Air Marshall Sir Augustus Walker and Sir William Ramsay (a returning past

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<sup>106</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

president, chosen for the RFU's centenary year in 1971).<sup>107</sup> Budge Rogers' phrase regarding the seating arrangements at post-match dinners comes to mind once more: this was the same pattern as 'had been forever'.<sup>108</sup> As Nigel Horton put it, those ex-players that went on to hold positions of power in the RFU 'followed on with the same traditions as previously, so the sport was very traditional. Steeped in tradition' (some of which he said was 'good', and some of which he described as 'appalling').<sup>109</sup>

John Pullin's thoughts on the subject were enlightening. As a former England captain and record cap-holder, he was perhaps a prime candidate for the highest echelons of the RFU (just as the previous two record cap-holders, Wavell Wakefield and Budge Rogers, had gone on eventually to the presidency). Instead, however, he chose not become a selector, despite invitations to do so:

[T]he option was open to me on several occasions, but the big factor was time, to be honest. I couldn't afford to be off every Saturday or Sunday or midweek, watching a game up in North Wales or Huddersfield or somewhere ... But if you've got plenty of money, plenty of time ... I could've been chairman of selectors I suppose, if you'd just kept going up the ladder sort-of-thing, which is what quite a few of them have done. No, it's not really for me.

As a farmer, Pullin's job was perhaps more demanding of his time than those of others who became selectors. Furthermore, Pullin believed that many were attracted to such roles because they wanted to be 'on the gravy train' – to enjoy expenses-paid trips and the other perks of a position on the RFU committee. This, Pullin said, did not interest him (and, in addition, he commented that he was not 'a great watcher of

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<sup>107</sup> 'Rugby Football History', accessed 4 August 2016, [www.rugbyfootballhistory.com](http://www.rugbyfootballhistory.com).

<sup>108</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>109</sup> Horton, interview.

rugby’ – ‘I’d rather be digging a hole in the ground I think than sat watching someone do something.’)<sup>110</sup>

Not all selectors and presidents were from prosperous, private-school backgrounds. Peter Ford, who came from a working-class background and left the secondary modern school he attended at thirteen, was an England selector in the 1970s (as well as serving in the administration at his club, Gloucester). He described his thoughts on the RFU as follows:

*PF:* I was on the full RFU committee ... I was happier at Gloucester. And as soon as ... I was dropped as a selector ... I came off the full [RFU committee], and said ‘Look, I’m at Gloucester, I’ll do what I can for rugby at Gloucester’ ...

*Interviewer:* What sorts of people did you use to deal with at the RFU?

*PF:* Better educated than me. Yeah, they were alright ... I mean there was some people that obviously knew I was not as well educated as them but – they accept you.

Ford said that he enjoyed his time as a selector, recalling the selectorial team he worked in as a ‘happy group’.<sup>111</sup> There was, however, a slight hint, in the pauses in his sentences and the diplomatic tone of his answers, that the world of the ‘better educated’ committee men at the RFU was not one he was entirely comfortable in; hence his preference for the familiarity of his home town club (Gloucester, as previously mentioned, was a town in which there was a greater degree of cross-class involvement in rugby union than was usual). This can, perhaps, be likened to Tom Danby’s situation at Harlequins, related in the previous chapter – acceptance, but perhaps not quite as ‘one of the gang’.<sup>112</sup> Whether or

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<sup>110</sup> Pullin, interview.

<sup>111</sup> Ford, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Danby, interview.

not this was the case, we can at least be sure of one thing: to be largely uneducated and from a lower-class background was unusual among the men of the RFU committee.

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the relationship between England players and selectors was a hierarchical one in which the latter held the balance of power. According to Nigel Horton, this continued to be the case in this period. When interviewed, he was particularly scathing about both the selectors and the RFU as a whole, saying:

We, as players, at that time, were pawns. Although we were representing England in front of sixty, seventy thousand people, we weren't important. The selectors and the vice-presidents of the RFU were important. We were just there for eighty minutes to do the job.<sup>113</sup>

According to Horton, this unequal relationship manifested itself particularly damningly in an episode involving an England match in Dublin in 1973. The previous year, in the wake of the Bloody Sunday shootings at the end of January, the Scottish and Welsh unions had made the decision to cancel their teams' scheduled Five Nations visits to Ireland.<sup>114</sup>

England were due to play Ireland at Twickenham that year, and the match between the two went ahead. The following year, however, with England scheduled to play in Dublin, there was some debate over whether the fixture should go ahead. Eventually, following a proposal to the RFU from the Middlesex county union that the match should be cancelled for safety reasons, the RFU voted strongly in favour of playing it. The president, Dickie Kingswell, assured the players that it would be their 'personal decision' whether to play or not, and that should anyone decline, 'their decision will be accepted and respected by the

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<sup>113</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>114</sup> This was much to the lamentation of those, like Wavell Wakefield – an England captain of the 1920s who was, by now, a Conservative peer – who believed in sport being 'healthily above politics', as he put it in a letter to *The Times*. *The Times*, 21 February 1972.

selection committee'. 'We hope', said Kingswell, 'the players will have sufficient confidence to believe that the committee would do nothing foolish in this matter.'<sup>115</sup>

Horton, as a policeman and therefore a more likely potential target for attack, was one of those who did not travel to Ireland – along with Jan Webster, Sam Doble and Peter Larter (an RAF officer).<sup>116</sup> Despite Kingswell's assurances on selection, none of the four played for England again that season. Horton, though – who had been told of England's decision to travel to Ireland in a meeting held by Micky Steele-Bodger, at that stage the Senior Vice-President of the RFU – was most angered by the lack of consultation with the players. Steele-Bodger, Horton recalled, 'said "we are going, the RFU have made the decision, we are going." And I thought ... who gives you that right to make that decision without asking the players if they want to go or not?'<sup>117</sup> To Steele-Bodger, also interviewed for this study, the decision was made because of 'bloody-mindedness'. 'It's a game', he said – 'it's done so much good, why should we damn it for something that's not of our own making?'<sup>118</sup> To Horton, though, the decision was the result of a class-based attitude on the part of the RFU. 'It was this class [attitude], and this "we are superior" attitude, and "you are just the player",' he said. 'That tradition of "we are the RFU, we're above anything," I think it's a criminal [one].' Furthermore, as indicated above, Horton believed it was an attitude that was perpetuated by 'most of the people that switched from being players to [being RFU administrators]'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *The Times*, 6 January 1973.

<sup>116</sup> Mick Cleary, 'The Day England Defied Death Threats in Dublin', *The Telegraph*, 19 February 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/england/2307990/The-day-England-defied-death-threats-in-Dublin.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>118</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>119</sup> Horton, interview.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the decision to play, and the way in which it was carried out, the attitude of both ‘sides’ in this dispute demonstrates the way in which rugby reflected models of class in England. Horton’s descriptions reflect an ‘us and them’ outlook (what Cannadine calls the ‘dichotomous’ model of class, ‘where society is sundered between “us” and “them”’), whereas the RFU’s approach reflects the idea of a hierarchy, in which those at the top make decisions on behalf of those beneath.<sup>120</sup> As previously stated, the language of class is often present in discussions of the nature of English rugby union.

Just as class remained influential in English society in the 1960s and 1970s, then, so it did in rugby union. The sport reflected the values and composition of the middle classes, from the jobs that players did to the way the game was run and the social engagements of the England team. There was, furthermore, little sign of change in this regard. The sport’s self-image of a classless game played by people of all walks of life remained an ideal reflected in outlying examples as opposed to an objective picture of the sport as a whole. In 1972, Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard carried out a postal survey of the occupations of rugby union players and officials. Of the 327 respondents, 304 – or 93 per cent – fell into one of the top two of the Registrar General’s six social classes (‘professional’ and ‘intermediate’). Six per cent were in skilled non-manual occupations, none were in partly skilled manual occupations, and just one fell into the bottom class of unskilled workers.<sup>121</sup> Rather than being a sport played by all types of people, it seems, rugby, in general, remained a sport played by

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<sup>120</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 19–20.

<sup>121</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 203.



all types of *middle-class* people. The extent to which this changed as the game moved further down the road to professionalism will be covered in the next chapter.

### **Work and playing the game**

I went to the [job] interview – it was a funny interview because I didn’t see any other candidates.

*Colin McFadyean, interview.*

As related in the previous chapter, rugby union’s relationship with work, both away from the sport and within it (i.e. training and playing), was defined in the immediate post-war years by a commitment to amateurism in favour of professionalism. The sport remained largely untouched by the growing concepts of meritocracy and professional expertise, preferring the old ways of doing things. What though, if anything, changed in the 1960s and 1970s? Did the sport begin to modernise in its relationship with, and outlook to, work, or did it continue to cling to an attitude of ‘cultivated amateurism’?<sup>122</sup> The answer seems to be that both were true of this period. These decades – particularly the 1970s – were a transitional time for the sport. While rugby union remained amateur in status, and relatively amateur in outlook, significant steps were taken on the road to professionalism in this period, and a noticeable tension between the old and the new began to emerge. Many of the foundations for professionalism were laid, with the widespread adoption and acceptance of coaching and the opening of the game to sponsorship money among the

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<sup>122</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 301.

most important. Despite these changes, though, the sport remained amateur at heart, and was usually reluctant to change – and consequently there was not yet any significant challenge to the sport's amateur status. Players still looked to their day jobs to earn a living, and their involvement in top-level rugby remained largely beneficial to them in the working world – though demands on their time from the sport were steadily increasing.

The major trend in work in post-war Britain – a move from manual to non-manual employment – continued into the 1960s and 1970s. The service sector continued to grow as manufacturing declined. By the mid-1960s, almost half of all employment in Britain was in services, and by 1971, this figure had reached 52 per cent.<sup>123</sup> Many service industries saw significant growth in employee numbers in this period; between 1966 and 1981, the financial industries workforce grew by just over 50 per cent, while education and medical services saw increases of 31 and 39 per cent respectively. At the same time, manufacturing industries continued to atrophy – employment in mechanical engineering decreased by 24 per cent, while metal and chemical manufacturing decreased by 36 per cent.<sup>124</sup> In addition to the rise of the service sector, there continued to be a shift within production industries towards non-manual work, as Andrew Newell points out in his chapter on structural change in *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Between 1963 and 1983, for example, there was a 6 per cent rise in the share of administrative, technical and clerical staff in manufacturing.<sup>125</sup>

Was this shift reflected in the jobs rugby players were doing? Tony Collins' statistics for England players suggest it may have been. In comparison with the figures for 1946-70,

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<sup>123</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 283.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>125</sup> Andrew Newell, 'Structural Change', in *Work and Pay in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, and Andrew Newell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.

there was a slight shift towards non-manual work from the 1970s onwards. Jobs are recorded for 131 players in the period 1971-1995 (from a total of 174 who made their debuts in this period). Of these, only nine had manual jobs – just 7 per cent. This had fallen from the 10 per cent recorded between 1946 and 1970, and therefore represents, to a certain extent, a shift in line with the population at large.<sup>126</sup> By far the most striking thing about these figures, though, is the difference between the percentage of England rugby players doing manual jobs and the percentage of the population as a whole. In 1971, for example, nearly 55 per cent of the working population were employed in manual jobs; in 1981, this figure was at 48 per cent.<sup>127</sup> The figures given above for England internationals – 7 and 10 per cent – are much smaller by comparison; much in the same way that the high percentages of privately-educated England players are significantly out of proportion with the single-digit percentages for the population at large. Again, the disproportionately middle-class nature of the game is clear to see.

So, while there are three builders recorded for 1971-1995, there are ten company directors; and while there are two electricians, there are thirty-one teachers. The increasing size of the financial services sector in Britain, mentioned above, is reflected in the fact that most of the job categories that saw an increase between the periods 1946-70 and 1971-95 were related to finance (insurance brokers increased from 1 to 5 per cent of players recorded; bankers rose from 1 to 4 per cent; stockbrokers increased from less than 1 per cent to 4 per cent – though they had also been relatively common before the war).<sup>128</sup> The burgeoning financial sector, and English rugby union's links to it, will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. In addition to financial jobs, there was a notable increase in

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<sup>126</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

<sup>127</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>128</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

this period in the category of chartered surveyor. There are previously only two recorded players doing this job in all periods prior to 1971, but there are seven in 1971-95 alone.<sup>129</sup> Gary Pearce was one of English rugby's chartered surveyors, starting as a trainee quantity surveyor in the construction industry in the late 1970s ('working out how many cubic metres of earth had to be moved from various road construction sites').<sup>130</sup> The increase in this category is perhaps linked to the trend, mentioned above, for a shift away from manual and towards non-manual work within production industries.

Overall, though, little changed in the occupational composition of the England team. The same job categories appear in high numbers – teachers, salesmen, company directors. As mentioned in the previous section, Phil Judd was an example, later on in his career, of the latter. Originally following his father to become an apprentice pattern maker, he eventually ran his own engineering business:

My father, he ran the pattern shop, and bought all castings and that for Webster and Bennett's, who made big boring mills in those days ... And I followed him – I was a pattern maker by trade. So I followed in my father's footsteps. And then I set up my own business, I had my own business as a pattern making company, with a chap called Cartwright who, we served apprenticeships together. We built this business up. And then we separated, then I built an engineering company up called Judd Engineering. And I employed about forty people at times. And that's basically what I did until the day I retired.<sup>131</sup>

Judd therefore embodied the increasing shift from manual to non-manual work, starting on the shop floor and eventually becoming a business owner.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>131</sup> Judd, interview.

Judd's Coventry and England teammate, John Owen, also ran an engineering business in the Midlands, though he had come from somewhat different beginnings. Owen was the managing director of Rubery Owen, which in 1975 was Britain's largest privately held company and had been in the family since John's father, Sir Alfred Owen, became the sole owner in the early twentieth century. In September 1975, *Time* magazine ran a cover feature on the company, with the headline 'Us vs Them'. The feature explored the difficulties in British industrial relations at the time through interviews and profiles on both the thirty-five-year-old John Owen (who had last played for England in 1967) and Doug Peach, a Rubery Owen employee and convenor for the Transport and General Workers' Union. A picture of two very different lives was painted: Owen living on 'a 16-acre estate' with his 'handsome blonde' wife and three children, and Peach in his 'two-bedroom row house on the main street of Bloxwich'. Owen drove a 'red Jaguar convertible', Peach a 'year-old Ford'; and while the former was pictured taking his two daughters for a ride on the family pony around the grounds of his estate, the latter was shown at work in his vegetable garden. While the article suggests that it was unclear who was winning the battle between union power and management at the troubled Rubery Owen, it sought to demonstrate that there were two distinct sides: as Peach put it, 'There has always got to be us and them'. Those involved with rugby union, in this case and many others, were more likely to be one of Peach's 'them'.<sup>132</sup>

Top-level rugby players, then, were still largely doing the same sorts of jobs in the 1960s and 1970s as they had been in the two previous decades. How much, though, did rugby continue to play a part in helping those in its 'fraternity' find

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<sup>132</sup> 'Upstairs/Downstairs at the Factory', *Time*, 15 September 1975.

employment? It seems that the idea of rugby union as a network which provided its members with social capital for use in the world of work continued to be prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, even as the concept of a meritocratic society advanced. It has previously been mentioned that Harold Perkin believed the idea of a fully meritocratic ‘professional society’ reached its zenith in the post-war years (up to the early 1970s). Perkin, however, noted that in the composition of the ‘social fabric’, the vertical ‘warp of professional career hierarchies’ was interrupted by the ‘horizontal weft of class’.<sup>133</sup> Status as a top-level rugby player acted almost as a sub-category of class in that sense.

The testimony of players working in 1960s and 1970s England demonstrates this. The story of Colin McFadyean’s first teaching job is a good example. McFadyean, who had attended two direct grant schools, followed by Loughborough Colleges, was hardly lacking in merit when he left college in the early 1960s and began to look for work. His rugby talent, however, and, in particular, a rugby connection from Loughborough, undoubtedly helped him:

There was a postgraduate man who came to do one year ... called Dave Parry ... He was chairman of the rugby team ... So when it came to applying for jobs he said ‘there’s a school in Birmingham you might be interested in’ ... He’d taught there, and he’d been to school there. And he had obviously negotiated behind the scenes to recruit me [laughs]. And I didn’t know that ... I went to the interview – it was a funny interview because I didn’t see any other candidates ... So I got the job ... But part of what he’d done was that he’d also given my name to Moseley [Rugby Club], and said ‘you must get hold of Colin’.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 455.

<sup>134</sup> McFadyean, interview.

David Duckham also found that his growing rugby fame lent a helping hand in his professional career. Duckham had joined Barclays Bank after leaving school, but after a few years there (and having become an England international and British Lion in that time) he moved into the construction industry to work in sales and marketing. The move was aided by his sporting status:

I was poached away from banking with an offer I couldn't refuse to get involved in the building industry, in a sort of sales and marketing role ... using my sporting background ... My first employer [in the building industry] was George Wimpey. The regional director in Birmingham was a Welshman – you can almost guess the rest.<sup>135</sup>

As well as helping players to find jobs, their sporting status also continued to help players perform their jobs. As related in the previous chapter, such status often 'meant the door opened up' in the world of work (to use the words of Phil Judd).<sup>136</sup> David Duckham used a similar phrase, recalling that rugby 'helped to open doors – or, perhaps I should really say it helped to unlock doors ... I could get in to see people because of my background'.<sup>137</sup> Budge Rogers commented that his fame as a rugby player often meant that 'the first bridge was there' when he attempted to conduct business deals locally: 'nine times out of ten when I rang the chief executive or the company secretary of a firm in Bedford or Luton ... they knew who I was'.<sup>138</sup>

Peter Ford provided an excellent example of this effect. The Gloucester and England player started working in the family fruit and potato business at the age of thirteen, when his father passed away. The business was a small and struggling one at that

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<sup>135</sup> Duckham, interview.

<sup>136</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>137</sup> Duckham, interview.

<sup>138</sup> Rogers, interview.

stage, but Ford would go on to gradually build it into a successful, multi-million-pound enterprise, and he believes his involvement in rugby had a part to play in this. As he put it, ‘playing rugby helped, you were known ... [I]t made life easy’. He recounted one tale which demonstrates this particularly clearly, involving a business deal which was expedited by his newfound fame as an England international:

I’d played against ... Wales, and we had some oranges on a ship into Cardiff docks. And I phoned up on the Monday; were these oranges available, were they released? ‘Oh no’, he said, the chap on the end of the phone, ‘oh, they won’t be ready for another week.’ He went on and he said, ‘Oh, your name Ford? Gloucester? Anything to do with rugby?’ I said ‘Well yeah, I’m a bit connected with it’. And he said, ‘Do you play?’ ... ‘Yeah’, I said, ‘I’ve played a bit of rugby.’ And: ‘You play on Saturday?’ And I said ‘Yeah, yeah.’ ‘Well what [about] these oranges...’, he said. ‘Oh’, he said, ‘hang on, hang on’ ... ‘you can send a lorry down this afternoon if you want to’ ... [From] ‘a week later’ – [to] ‘this afternoon’. Because of rugby.<sup>139</sup>

This is an excellent demonstration of rugby ‘opening doors’ – of a rugby player gaining access to something that a similarly qualified non-player would not have had access to.

As had been the case in the past, rugby union players in this era tended to find that their employers were happy to accommodate their sporting commitments. While this was not necessarily the case for all, most were able to take time off when they needed to. Budge Rogers explained that ‘it wasn’t a difficult thing to balance really ... [and] if my firm had said “Oh no, we’re not going to give you time off”, I’d say “Well, bye bye” – I’d have left, simple as that.’<sup>140</sup> Roger Uttley, a teacher, said:

Northumberland LEA were very good to me. My first job was ... at Whitley Bay. And it was 1971, and England were going on tour in October, and I got picked for

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<sup>139</sup> Ford, interview.

<sup>140</sup> Rogers, interview.



the tour, and it was to the Far East ... And I had to apply for leave of absence. So I taught for a month, and then I had to have leave of absence for a month, and they said 'Well you can go, but we're not going to pay you.'<sup>141</sup>

Other employers were even more generous. David Duckham was working in a branch of Barclays Bank when he first started playing top-level rugby, and recalled their accommodating attitude towards his sporting commitments:

In those days there was Saturday morning banking ... but I used to need most Saturdays off to go and play ... And then when I eventually got into the England team ... in those days international teams used to meet forty-eight hours before, so every so often I had a Thursday and a Friday off. I didn't lose any pay. I'm sure it was to the chagrin of my colleagues in the branch around me ... I was obviously being treated as a special case.

Similarly, Duckham received time off with full pay when he was picked to tour with the British Lions in 1971 – a tour that lasted over three months. 'They had unofficially given me permission to go,' he recalled, 'six months before the tour party was announced':

One of the regional directors ... had said to me on the 'QT' ... 'we can see what's going to happen, you're going to get picked for this Lions tour aren't you?' And I said 'Well, I'd certainly like to sir but ... is that going to cause a problem?' And he said 'No, it isn't.' And that's all he said ... So I was very lucky – with pay as well.<sup>142</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter, organisations were increasingly recognising the beneficial effects of having famous sportsmen in their ranks – and therefore allowing players time off to play for England or the British Lions was often seen as a good PR

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<sup>141</sup> Uttley, interview.

<sup>142</sup> Duckham, interview.

move. Nigel Horton, a policeman at the time, went on the British Lions tour to New Zealand in 1977. He recalled that he was given the time off with full pay:

You went on the tour and you were still paid your salary, because it was considered cheap publicity for the police to benefit off the back of it. Earlier on in my career, they did a national publicity drive using my photograph in a police uniform, as an English player.<sup>143</sup>

Duckham recounts that when he left Barclays in 1973, one of the regional directors of the bank expressed regret that they had not used his image more often to promote the company.<sup>144</sup> The advertising power of rugby stars was such that David Caplan, a dentist, was warned against mentions of his job in the context of his sporting fame:

You were hardly allowed to say you were a dentist ... because it was free advertising and dentists weren't allowed to advertise ... I had a bit of a problem, they came and took some photographs of me in my surgery immediately after the England-Scotland game, for the England-Ireland game, and there was one picture in the paper. And the General Dental Council, I'm sure, someone contacted me from somewhere saying 'don't let any more photographs be taken of you in the surgery,' because you weren't allowed to advertise in any way, shape or form.<sup>145</sup>

Not every player found it easy balancing their working and sporting lives, though. While most players were in jobs that allowed them to take frequent time off without too much difficulty, others found their work more prohibitive. John Pullin, a farmer, was able to take the time off he needed, but found it affected his workload when not playing:

You had to work harder really, because you missed a fair bit of time on tours and things like that, so you did more when you were at home. No, the best really would be to play at home for Bristol, and you could work at home up until about two

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<sup>143</sup> Horton, interview.

<sup>144</sup> Duckham, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Caplan, interview.

o'clock, watch the 2.15 race on television, rush down the rugby club, get changed, and just get out on the pitch on time for a three o'clock kick-off.<sup>146</sup>

Others were simply unable to afford the time away from work that touring involved. David Duckham recalled that 'one or two had to give up their jobs' to go on the 1971 British Lions tour to New Zealand, while Phil Judd – despite his obvious talent and status as an England captain – was never able to tour with the Lions:

I could not afford to go on a British Lions tour, though I got asked to go on the Lions tour. I had to decline them. Because, in those days, you were an amateur, and that was it ... I couldn't afford the time off. I mean, I'd got a wife and two children, so it was impossible.

Judd commented that the 1963 England tour to Australia and New Zealand, which he did go on, was 'just long enough' for him to afford – it lasted just under a month. The two Lions tours he declined, however – in 1962 to South Africa, and 1966 to Australia, New Zealand and Canada – were more than three and four months long respectively.<sup>147</sup>

In general, however, being a member of the 'rugby fraternity' continued to be a largely positive thing when it came to the world of work, and the two tended to slot together relatively easily. Few of the players from this era who were interviewed reported any major problems in getting time off to play rugby, or in finding a job, and most did not report any negative effects that their rugby career had on their working career. This does, perhaps, depend on the individual's view of the relative importance of their rugby career and working career. Both David Duckham and Peter Rossborough mentioned that their

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<sup>146</sup> Pullin, interview.

<sup>147</sup> Judd, interview.

rugby careers may have hampered their progression at work, with the latter talking of this as a ‘sacrifice’ that was made in the name of rugby. Duckham, for example, mentioned this in reference to qualifications he hoped to gain while at Barclays:

[Rugby] did start to interfere with what I was trying to achieve in my career, and to get on, I needed the Institute of Bankers exams. It was split into two parts, and I got halfway through stage one ... and then my [rugby] career just took off, and while I stayed in the bank for nine years, until 1973, I was, in a way, caught in a vicious circle.<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, Rossborough commented: ‘I must have missed out on promotions at work because I was always taking time off to go and play here, there and wherever. There came a time when I couldn’t do that.’<sup>149</sup> As professional work became more competitive, and professional qualifications became more important (as explored in the next chapter), there was perhaps a sense that involvement in rugby was not always a positive factor in the world of work – though it seems, on balance, that the positive effects continued to outweigh the negative effects.

When it came to the occupational culture of rugby union itself, this was a period in which the first significant challenges to the sport’s firmly amateur outlook emerged. In the areas of training, coaching and competition – in short, playing the game – the 1960s and 1970s marked the real beginning of rugby union’s transition into a professional sport. Despite the changes that took place, though, there was still little sense that a change in the sport’s overall amateur status was imminent. Such changes did come to other sports in this period. Cricket abolished its amateur-professional divide in 1963, the distinction between ‘gentlemen’ and ‘players’ by then seen as ‘outdated’ and ‘even hypocritical’, given the

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<sup>148</sup> Duckham, interview.

<sup>149</sup> Rossborough, interview.

number of amateurs effectively making a living from the sport by being employed in sinecures by their counties.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, tennis became open in 1967, while in football, though the sport was already professional, the maximum wage and retain and transfer systems were abolished in the early 1960s, removing two significant occupational restrictions for professional players.<sup>151</sup> In rugby union, however – though it may have begun to enter the minds of some – there were few calls at this time for players to be paid.

As noted in the previous chapter, the state of training and coaching in the 1940s and 1950s had been embryonic. Though clubs and the national side did train, they did not attach significant importance to it. Training sessions were often taken by the captain rather than a dedicated coach, and, certainly at the national level, little real preparation for matches took place. Instead, rugby union adopted an approach of ‘cultivated amateurism’, remaining wary of any perceived advances towards a more professional outlook. There was no sudden change to this in the 1960s. Phil Judd recalled that at Coventry, ‘training was up to the individual ... Some of them just ran round the pitch four times and that would be it.’<sup>152</sup> Don Rutherford, who began playing for Gloucester in the early 1960s after taking his first teaching job at the nearby Wycliffe College, remembered that there were few coaches involved in club rugby at the time; ‘there might have been at school level,’ he said, ‘but certainly not at club level. It was very amateur, to say the least.’ He recalled a revealing joke made by Gloucester’s captain at the time, Peter Ford, before one match: ‘Right lads, all of you, round here, round the fire – we’re going to warm up.’<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Guardian*, 27 November 1962.

<sup>151</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 79; *Ibid.*, 81–82.

<sup>152</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>153</sup> Rutherford, interview.

As discussed previously, this lackadaisical approach was also adopted at national level. Budge Rogers, who played for England between 1961 and 1969, winning a record number of caps, is perhaps better placed than anyone to comment on England's approach to training and preparation in the 1960s. He recalled it thus:

The rules were that international teams could not meet more than forty-eight hours before the game. So we met on a Thursday, late afternoon, and we'd go out on the Friday morning, as a team with the reserves, and plan or run around, introduce each other – because there were so many changes every game. There was no consistency of selection. So, you know, people had to get to know each other. And we would just have a run around, and practice line-outs, and decide line-out signals; try and do a bit of scrummaging against the reserves. Backs would do a few running-around moves. And all under the control of the captain. No coach. Selectors standing on the touchline. And it was that amateur.

This amateur approach was typified by the travel arrangements for Rogers' first game for England, which was to take place in Dublin against Ireland. He had received instructions to meet at King's Cross train station, and he remembered the following:

I thought 'what the hell are we meeting at King's Cross for, we're going to Ireland.' And we went by train to Holyhead, got the ferry, went across overnight to Dublin on the ferry. And I remember saying to someone – I at last had the nerve to speak to anybody – 'what have we done there, why didn't we fly?' And they said the secretary, Colonel Prentice, doesn't like flying. What a build up to a match.

This episode is also further evidence of the hierarchical nature of English rugby at this time – decisions were made by those within the RFU, and the players had to obey.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Rogers, interview.

Though rugby union's approach to training and preparation was still decidedly amateur, progress was being made towards a more professional outlook. Building on the small steps taken by an interested few in previous years, more interest was beginning to develop in the idea of coaching and performance. The RFU set up a coaching sub-committee in 1963, and began to run coaching courses for schools; this was then followed by the creation of the Coaching Advisory Panel in 1965, which Ian Beer founded and chaired.<sup>155</sup> The panel, which was made up of former internationals Jeff Butterfield (England), Howell Griffiths (Wales), Bob McEwen (Scotland), Mark Sugden (Ireland) and Ray Williams (Wales), wrote and published *A Guide for Coaches*.<sup>156</sup> Beer also asked Don Rutherford, who as well as being in charge of rugby at Wycliffe College had begun coaching his teammates at Gloucester, to produce a report on coaching in Australia and New Zealand, where he was visiting as a member of the touring British Lions squad in 1966. Rutherford did so, benefiting from the cooperation of many of the Australian and New Zealand coaches he encountered (particularly, he recalled, the New Zealand national coach Fred Allen).<sup>157</sup>

As the coaching panel continued its activities, it eventually persuaded the RFU to appoint a 'technical administrator' (specifically named a 'technical' administrator, as previously mentioned, because many in the RFU committee were against the name 'coaching administrator').<sup>158</sup> This, as a full-time, paid position, was somewhat of a landmark in English rugby, and represented a significant sign that the sport was starting to take coaching, training and performance more seriously. Partly as a result of the report he had produced, Don Rutherford was the man appointed to do the job. His appointment was

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<sup>155</sup> Beer, 'Development of Coaching'.

<sup>156</sup> *A Guide for Coaches* (Rugby Football Union, n.d.).

<sup>157</sup> Beer, 'Development of Coaching'; Rutherford, interview.

<sup>158</sup> Beer, 'Development of Coaching'.

confirmed in October 1968, and he began his duties on 1 September 1969.<sup>159</sup> He recalled the appointment thus:

There was an advert in the papers that the [RFU] were interested, when I was at St Paul's School. And I thought, well I'll try for that, because I was on the panel by then – they asked me to join the advisory panel of coaches, because of New Zealand really. And so they were very interested in me, and I applied, and I got the job. And I became their first technical man.<sup>160</sup>

According to Beer, Rutherford was appointed from a pool of forty-two applicants – there was clearly no shortage of interested candidates.<sup>161</sup>

The creation of Rutherford's position made way for another first in English rugby union – the appointment of a national team coach. Announced in the summer of 1969, the RFU selected Don White, a former Northampton and England player, for the job.<sup>162</sup> England promptly won their first game with White as coach – an 11-8 victory over South Africa on the Springboks' 1969-70 tour – though he would step down at the end of the 1970-71 season after a largely unsuccessful tenure.<sup>163</sup> The symbolism of White's appointment was significant, though. Despite the fact that, as Rutherford put it, 'coaching was a dirty word' among many of the RFU committee at the time, progress was undeniably being made, and such progress continued in the 1970s.<sup>164</sup> At the start of the decade, the RFU published *Touchdown*, a 'colourful paperback book on the game' to mark the Union's centenary season. The book, as RFU president William Ramsay put it in the foreword, concentrated on 'the contemporary rugby scene', including 'those growth areas which will

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<sup>159</sup> *The Times*, 4 October 1968.

<sup>160</sup> Rutherford, interview.

<sup>161</sup> Beer, 'Development of Coaching'.

<sup>162</sup> *The Times*, 7 July 1969.

<sup>163</sup> *The Times*, 12 October 1971.

<sup>164</sup> Rutherford, interview. Rutherford also said: "There were people on the full committee who stood up in the first meeting I ever went to, they said "There's too much coaching in this land, lad.""



affect rugby's future development'. 'Coaching, training [and] tactical evolution', Ramsay wrote, was one such growth area.<sup>165</sup> As the decade moved on, Rutherford continued in his job – he would do so until the late 1990s – and England continued to appoint a national team coach. The RFU also produced further coaching material, publishing *Better Rugby* (with Rutherford as editor) and *A Guide for Players* in 1973.<sup>166</sup>

Alan Old, an England international who played throughout this decade, called this time the 'advent of coaching'. He mentioned that at the beginning of the decade, his club side Middlesbrough did not have a coach and it was left to him, as captain, to organise training. Soon enough, though, 'coaches became much more part of the scene and ... they took over.'<sup>167</sup> Peter Rossborough also suggested that the 1970s saw the first real advances in a more professional outlook to the game:

I was lucky in being both with Coventry and with Durham where we actually had coaches, and certainly when I was playing for England we had coaches, so I was there at the advent of a bit more professionalism – in the non-paying-money sense – being applied to the game. We got fitter, we found out better ways of getting fitter, we found out better ways of acquiring skills and honing skills, developing team units, individual skills and that sort of thing.<sup>168</sup>

Despite all this progress, though, and claims that 'the casual approach to preparation for internationals was at an end', evidence from those playing in this era suggests a truly professional approach to training and coaching was still some way off.<sup>169</sup> Peter Rossborough commented that although the appointment of Don White did signal a degree of change, 'the way coaches were appointed in those days' was still 'very amateurish,

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<sup>165</sup> Geoffrey Nicholson, ed., *Touchdown and Other Moves in the Game* (Rugby Football Union, 1970).

<sup>166</sup> *Better Rugby* (Rugby Football Union, 1973); *A Guide for Players* (Rugby Football Union, 1973).

<sup>167</sup> Alan Old, interview, 12 November 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>169</sup> Reyburn, *The Men in White*, 123.

and a bit ... “jobs for the boys”. ‘It was just: “Well we all know Don, he’s a good bloke,’ said Rossborough; “he’s keen on doing that, let’s appoint him.” And that’s the way coaches were appointed in those days.’<sup>170</sup> Budge Rogers stated that England ‘went through [coaches] like no business’ in the 1970s.<sup>171</sup> Alan Old, though noting (as mentioned above) that progress was being made, also believed that England’s preparations during this era left a lot to be desired:

[We were] the tip of the pyramid ... and we weren’t even looked after as well as some of the people at the bottom of the pyramid ... Some of the county sides would have looked after their players and got them together better than England were doing at the time. All that did develop ... but rugby as a sport had been on television for a long time by then. So there wasn’t really any excuse that there wasn’t more thought put into how you integrated teams or developed things.

Indeed, Old commented that ‘when you look back at the amateurism and the lack of help in terms of putting things together’, the situation seems ‘crazy’. He noted the fact that ‘selection, at all levels, was a lottery’, and that the trial system was ‘a complete mess’. ‘The whole structure was laid back’, he said, and was characterised by the typical exhortations of those in charge: “‘We can beat anybody”, you know, “Come on chaps”’.<sup>172</sup>

In fact, the tension between an amateur approach and a professional one – the old ways and the new – did, it seem, manifest itself in some ways as a tension between those in charge of the game and those playing it. Don Rutherford, for example, called this the ‘great divide’ of the time:

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<sup>170</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>171</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>172</sup> Old, interview.

*Interviewer:* You mentioned that coaching was a ‘dirty word’ at first – did that continue to be the case?

*DR:* Not with those who were playing; but certainly committee members hated it. You know, that was the great divide, as it were. The committee thought coaching was very esoteric and you didn’t need to do it. You were either good enough or not.<sup>173</sup>

John Pullin, an England captain in the 1970s, said that, as Rutherford suggested, players at that time would rather have been coached than not coached.<sup>174</sup> Committee men, however, were indeed often suspicious as Rutherford stated. In 1968, for example, the IRB were moved to discuss ‘recent developments in the intensification of coaching as a feature of the game’, to ensure all member countries were ‘satisfied that these developments were in all respects consistent with the amateur principles’ of the sport.<sup>175</sup> The following year, in an attempt to re-state these principles, the Board re-affirmed their regulation prohibiting international teams from meeting up more than two days prior to a match – though they accepted, in a carefully worded minute, that ‘voluntary amateur coaching in the sense of teaching and encouraging players and teams is a sound feature of Rugby Union Football.’<sup>176</sup>

A survey conducted by Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard for *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* (originally published in 1979) further supports the idea of a divide between those in charge of the sport and those playing it. The survey asked various categories of people involved in the game whether they approved of training and coaching. While Dunning and Sheard used the evidence collected to conclude that ‘the overwhelming majority of our sample ... approve unreservedly of the serious-minded approach which now

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<sup>173</sup> Rutherford, interview.

<sup>174</sup> Pullin, interview.

<sup>175</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 14-15 March 1968, Edinburgh.

<sup>176</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 13-14 March 1969, London.

predominates', there is in fact an outlier which they do not analyse. The percentage of respondents who approved of coaching is significantly lower among RFU committee members than it is among players and club secretaries. While up to 78 per cent of top-level club players, for example, were in favour of coaching, only 44 per cent of RFU committee men were. Similarly, only 17 per cent of top-level club players had 'reservations' about coaching, whereas 44 per cent of RFU committee members did.<sup>177</sup> While this shows that those at the RFU were in no way unanimously opposed to coaching, and indicates that attitudes had begun to move on from the rigidly amateur approach of the past, it does demonstrate that their thoughts on the matter were distinctly out of step with those involved at other levels of the game – particularly those playing it.<sup>178</sup>

Don Rutherford suggested that this divide was due to a fear of professionalism.<sup>179</sup> Micky Steele-Bodger, a man at the heart of the rugby establishment in this period, used the same phrase, saying: 'At that time, we were fearful of professionalism. And, I think, quite correctly.'<sup>180</sup> Indeed, Steele-Bodger's successor as RFU president, Ken Chapman, spoke on accepting his position in 1974 of the 'pressure to accept ... what is popularly described in the media as a "more professional approach" to the game', and affirmed his commitment to preserving 'the standards of true amateurism'. Failure to do so, he thought, 'might well destroy the game'. His fears had not been assuaged by the end of his term in office; 'I have', he told the annual general meeting a year later, 'been considerably alarmed at what seems to me to be an increase in the desire to win at any cost'.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 220–21.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Rutherford, interview.

<sup>180</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>181</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 19 July 1974, London; Minutes of the RFU AGM, 11 July 1975, London.

This fear of professionalism was also fuelled by changes in other areas of the game. As television began to become ‘the most important medium for sports coverage’, greater public attention was focused on England’s matches and the Five Nations tournament became a ‘showpiece’ event for the BBC.<sup>182</sup> Alongside this, and in some ways allied to it, new competitions and the increased acceptance of sponsorship money became causes for concern for rugby’s traditionalists, and further increased the tension in the sport between modernisation and conservatism. One particularly symbolic piece of modernisation was the introduction in the 1971-72 season of a knockout cup competition for clubs – something which the RFU had previously opposed. David Duckham described the introduction of the competition:

*Interviewer:* As players, when that competition came in, did you welcome it?

*DD:* Yes, I think in those days, remembering we were very, very amateur, we took things like that in our stride. It wasn’t suddenly a very exciting new innovation. All of our fixture lists in those days were just friendly fixtures. There was no leagues ... we just turned up – alright, having prepared and trained – to play for our club in our time on a Saturday afternoon. It was a recreation, if you like ... we had to take it a bit more seriously than that – but that was the way I think amateur players treated the game ... So certainly I took it in my stride when the [RFU] announced this competition. They labelled it ‘equivalent of the FA Cup’ ... And I think in England they were trying to make the game more competitive, and it certainly worked. Because when we played cup games there was obviously an extra edge, because we knew we had to win.<sup>183</sup>

The interplay between the sport’s long-cherished amateur status and an increasing desire for a more professional outlook is evident in Duckham’s words. While it is clear that

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<sup>182</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 191; *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>183</sup> Duckham, interview.

players still saw themselves as amateurs, innovations like the cup competition (and the ‘surprise’ creation of regional merit tables by the RFU in 1976, as a response to an Anglo-Welsh merit table organised by a group of clubs) were subtly steering the sport down a new path.<sup>184</sup> Such changes were gradual, however, and as Duckham suggested, the introduction of a cup competition did not amount to a sudden ‘big bang’ moment. Indeed, when Budge Rogers’ Bedford side won the cup in 1975, the celebrations told of a still rather amateur affair: ‘I booked Franco’s in Jermyn Street’, Rogers recalled, ‘and we had a private dinner with wives, which we paid for. Nothing from the club even. And that was ’75, not the fifties.’<sup>185</sup>

Nowhere was the tension between amateurism and professionalism more evident than in the sport’s relationship with money. The 1970s, in particular, was a transitional time for this, with the presence of money in English rugby union becoming more overt and more accepted by those in charge than it had been in the past. Commercial sponsorship entered the game on an official level in the early 1970s. The RFU reversed their previous rejection of sponsorship money in 1969 (as something that ‘could not be tolerated or even considered’) and declared, just two years later, that ‘patronage and commercial assistance are acceptable provided they benefit the game’.<sup>186</sup> Though English cricket had first embraced commercial sponsorship eight years earlier when it was agreed Gillette would sponsor a new cup competition, as Tony Collins points out, rugby union was not too far behind the times – rugby league first allowed sponsorship of competitions in 1971 and the Football League only began to permit shirt sponsors from 1978.<sup>187</sup> Following this decision,

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<sup>184</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1976.

<sup>185</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>186</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 189; Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 15–16 April 1971, London.

<sup>187</sup> Derek Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket* (London: Aurum Press, 2013), 294; Collins, *Social History*, 189.

a number of sponsors were soon on board. The first major deal was announced at the start of the 1975-76 season: tobacco brand John Player, who had sponsored the first limited-overs 'Sunday League' in English cricket since its launch in 1969, were to pay more than £100,000 to sponsor the cup competition over the following three years. This was despite the fact that 'the RFU [had] hitherto been adamant that a sponsor's name should not appear in the title of an event.'<sup>188</sup>

Some remained wary of sponsorship. In 1972, former private school headmaster and senior civil servant Sir George Mallaby was asked to chair an independent committee and produce a report on the structure of the RFU. Budge Rogers was one of the seven members of the committee, and recalled their discussions on sponsorship:

We ... interviewed people from other sports; I'll always remember the head of swimming came and said ... 'If you're thinking of going down the sponsorship road, be careful. We allowed Heinz to sponsor the national swimming championships, now they tell us where we've got to hold them' ... And we warned against sponsorship, because this was being talked about ... Basically, use the money – we even used the words – use the money for 'non-essential expenditure' so you can turn the tap off if the sponsor starts to become too greedy.

As Rogers went on to say, the Mallaby report (the major recommendations of which concerned the RFU's organisational structure) was largely 'thrown out' by the RFU.<sup>189</sup> The RFU insisted that commercial involvement would not be allowed to harm the sport, though Dunning and Sheard suggested that 'each further increment in the game's

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<sup>188</sup> Birley, *English Cricket*, 301; *Guardian*, 5 September 1975.

<sup>189</sup> Rogers, interview.

dependency and that of its controlling organization on outside finance posed another threat to the RFU's autonomy and to the amateur ethos in its pristine form.'<sup>190</sup>

Some sponsorship deals in this time were organised on slightly more unofficial lines. Roger Uttley recalled an approach to the England team by sportswear giant Adidas in the mid-1970s:

RU: [Former athlete] Robbie Brightwell was in charge at Adidas in Poynton in those days, and if you were one of the 'favoured ones', you'd get invited, you would make a trip up to the 'gift of kit' room, up at Poynton, and you'd be in there and you'd get a few boxes of shoes, and bits of extra kit, which was all very nice ...

*Interviewer:* Were [the RFU] aware it was going on?

RU: Probably, but they didn't have the wherewithal to stop it.

Adidas, indeed, was not the only company seeking the promotional pull of England's rugby players. Uttley also recalled a story, notorious in rugby circles, involving his teammate Andy Ripley: 'Rips got approached ... by Adidas to wear their boots, and then he got approached by somebody else', remembered Uttley. Ripley's solution to this dilemma? 'He wore one of each.'<sup>191</sup> The second company was Gola, who had organised a separate deal with Ripley's club Rosslyn Park, which required any of the club's players who represented England to wear Gola boots during internationals. (Ripley, according to former Rosslyn Park secretary Peter Thorley, donated the Adidas money to charity.)<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 216.

<sup>191</sup> Uttley, interview.

<sup>192</sup> 'Andy Ripley OBE', *Parknews*, accessed 6 December 2016, <http://www.rosslynpark.co.uk/wp-content/docs/special.pdf>. Ripley denied this story in an article in *The Times* on 18 September 1982, saying it was 'a nice story' but 'untrue'. However, a photo of Ripley running out on to the pitch for England's 1975 Five Nations game against France clearly shows that he is wearing a Gola boot on his left foot and an Adidas boot, on which he appears to have blacked out two of the famous three stripes, on his right. The photo can be viewed on the Colorsport website:

'England's Andy Ripley - 1975 Five Nations', *Colorsport*, accessed 21 September 2017, <http://prints.colorsport.co.uk/englands-andy-ripley-1975-five-nations/print/7944239.html>.



These types of payments were against the sport's amateur regulations. The ultimate taboo, though, was being directly paid for playing. Rumours of illicit payments, which became known by the catch-all term of 'boot money', had abounded in the sport for many years. There had always been particular suspicion over the prevalence of the practice in Wales. Nigel Horton, for example, believed that such payments 'definitely' happened in Wales, though Budge Rogers was a little more reluctant to accept the possibility that the amateur laws had been broken. 'There were always stories, I think they were apocryphal, about money in boots in Wales,' he said. 'I don't know, I don't think there was.' Peter Rossborough suggested that 'clearly there would be some truth to that, and I suspect some English clubs would indulge in that as well.'<sup>193</sup> English players had indeed undoubtedly benefited from clandestine payments over the years. Ever since payments to players were outlawed by the RFU in 1886, there had been cases – some detected and punished, some not – of players receiving financial inducements.<sup>194</sup> Ted Woodward gives a typical example of such an instance, this particular episode occurring in the 1950s:

I was paid once. Gerwyn Williams used to run a team at Llanelli. And it was a Gerwyn Williams XV against – I can't even remember who we played against, probably it was a Gerwyn Williams XV against Llanelli ... And I had £50 in my shoe ... and that was a lot of money.<sup>195</sup>

Such payments continued to take place in the following decades. Roger Uttley recalled that 'there were situations where there was the odd "brown envelope" episode', including a game organised 'for a couple of years' between two international XVs at Gateshead.<sup>196</sup> David Caplan also played in that game:

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<sup>193</sup> Horton, interview; Rogers, interview; Rossborough, interview.

<sup>194</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 27.

<sup>195</sup> Woodward, interview.

<sup>196</sup> Uttley, interview.

People were being paid ... I played in a couple of games where we got paid boot money for turning up to play games. There was a Gateshead Fell foundation that ... [British athlete] Brendan Foster was part of. And they used to channel money into rugby union. So instead of spreading the money around very thinly at lots of clubs, they used to get a very high-profile game every year ... I played this game one year and I was the only non-British Lion player to play the game. They were all British Lions ... It was a Gateshead Fell XV against an international XV.

When asked whether he was worried if the RFU would find out about his contravention of the amateur rules, Caplan replied:

I think it got to the stage where it was a fairly well-known secret, really. I don't think anyone really got too wound up. Because people were devoting quite a lot of time to travelling and playing the game. There wasn't much of it I don't think, but there was a bit of it at that kind of level.<sup>197</sup>

Payment for playing rugby union also took more indirect forms. In a famous episode in 1897, the Welsh Football Union withdrew from the International Board after the latter objected to their award of a £500 house to star player Arthur Gould on his retirement.<sup>198</sup> Eighty years later, such things were still happening in the game. In 1977, Nigel Horton moved to France to play for Toulouse. As he described it, he 'became a semi-professional', rewarded for playing for the club by being given a place to live in and a bar to run:

They gave me a villa to live in, and they gave me a business. I never played for money. I look back on it and wish I'd have known my value ... I started to learn what players were being paid, and I realised I was cheap labour.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Caplan, interview.

<sup>198</sup> Smith and Williams, *Fields of Praise*, 94.

<sup>199</sup> Horton, interview.

Such indirect compensation would become more common as the game moved further down the road to professionalism, and greater amounts of money were injected into it. But although some forms of ‘payment’ were largely overlooked by the authorities, others were more strictly policed. A number of players in this era fell foul of the RFU for writing autobiographies after they had finished playing and, therefore, in the eyes of those in charge, profiting from the game. Mike Burton, in his own book (published in 1982), writes:

Recently, a number of great players have been ruled right out of rugby because they told the story of their careers and pocketed the proceeds. This makes them dirty professionals in administrative eyes, and they are banned from playing, even coaching or selecting, in rugby union again ... I too have been banned for life for writing this book, and accepting payments for doing so.<sup>200</sup>

Burton lists David Duckham as one such player banned for writing a book. Duckham himself recalled this happening:

I was keen to do some coaching in some guise or other. I was warned off that by [the RFU]. Because I’d written an autobiography a year after I’d finished, I was branded a professional. In fact I had a letter from [the RFU] saying I’m in breach of law so-and-so, sub-paragraph so-and-so. And it’s not that I wasn’t allowed to do anything, it’s that players, young and old, weren’t allowed to be associated with me because I was ‘professionalised’ ... Funnily enough in later years, in 1995 when the game was declared open ... I then had another letter from [the RFU] saying: ‘We’re now glad to inform you that you’re re-instated as an amateur.’<sup>201</sup>

If the lines between amateurism and professionalism were starting to become blurred in some senses, this appears to have been one area in which they were still very distinct.

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<sup>200</sup> Burton, *Never Stay Down*, 183.

<sup>201</sup> Duckham, interview.

There was another, more prominent area in which this was the case. Rugby football's great divide, that between the professional code of league and the amateur code of union, remained as chasmic as ever in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a divide that was strictly policed by the RFU, who sought to maintain the 'impregnable barrier' they had first erected following the formation of the breakaway Northern Union in 1895 (which led to the creation of the two different codes).<sup>202</sup> As Mike Burton wrote:

You can play union and join a golf club, or a squash club; you can play union and join a cricket club; you can play union if you have just left Pentonville Prison, where you spent the last twenty years for murdering six people, but you can't play union after joining a rugby league club and being paid to play.<sup>203</sup>

For rugby union players, any involvement in the 'other' code carried with it a lifetime ban from rugby union. Burton, who told the story of a furtive appearance he made in a rugby league trial match in Warrington in 1965, pointed out that 'even a trial makes you a professional in the eyes of the people who uphold union bye-laws.'<sup>204</sup> Ray French was one of a number of players who did make the switch from union to league in the post-war amateur period, playing union for England in 1961 before moving to his home town rugby league club, St Helens. He described the consequences for his association with St Helens rugby union club:

I signed for Saints, from this club [St Helens rugby union club], 1961, and I had to be banned from the club. The club didn't want to ban me. But they had to enforce a ban, that I could not come in the club. In actual fact I sent them a donation, but that had to be kept quiet, because if it had been found out that the club took the donation, *they* would be banned.

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<sup>202</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 37.

<sup>203</sup> Burton, *Never Stay Down*, 136.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

Ten years later, with French now retired from playing either code, the situation remained the same:

When I retired from rugby league, be, what, '71, '71-2, I came coaching down here [St Helens rugby union club]. And I took the first team for about – oh, best part of four years, something like that ... And then, it was brought out that I was coaching here. [The RFU] wouldn't put up with it, and so [the club] had to ban me again ... I couldn't coach.<sup>205</sup>

Once a player had moved to rugby league and 'gone professional', even entry to a rugby union clubhouse was supposedly off-limits. David Caplan described a situation at Headingley rugby union club involving Mike Lampkowski, a former Headingley and England player:

[Lampkowski] went to rugby league ... And it was quite sad that because there was this terrible divide between rugby union and rugby league ... and he came back to the club one day to watch a game, and the alickadoos at the club actually wouldn't let him into the clubhouse until we ... said 'hey come on, this is ridiculous.'<sup>206</sup>

Colin McFadyean told a similar story involving Moseley, where he played in the 1960s and early 1970s:

Those players from Moseley [who had switched to rugby league] were not allowed by the RFU to come into the clubhouse at Moseley ... The players let them in, the club let them in. But they were not allowed to be there legally. It was almost like they had some bloody disease. Ridiculous.<sup>207</sup>

Such stories were commonplace, and reflected a situation which Caplan described as 'stupid'. As he also pointed out, though, 'that's the way it was. And that carried on for an

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<sup>205</sup> French, interview.

<sup>206</sup> Caplan, interview.

<sup>207</sup> McFadyean, interview.

awful long time.’ It was one vestige of rugby union’s amateur heyday that showed no signs of disappearing.<sup>208</sup>

While a number of players, like French and Lampkowski (and Tom Danby, as mentioned in the previous chapter), did make the switch from union to league in the post-war period, many also turned down the chance to do so. A number of the players interviewed for this thesis, for example, told of approaches made by rugby league clubs. Here is one typical story, as told by Peter Rossborough:

When I was at university I was approached by St Helens – this was in 1969 – and I was offered £3,000 ... And I was living on £30 a term as a university student. And it was tempting. But I didn’t, in the end, didn’t go – preferred to stay with my mates and that sort of thing. My rugby union career was beginning to develop in terms of the UAU and Durham county and Warwickshire and this sort of thing as well, so I wrote back very politely and said ‘thank you but no thank you’, and that was that.<sup>209</sup>

Such stories tend to follow a similar pattern – a large amount of money was offered, the player was tempted, but they ultimately chose to stick with what they knew and remain an amateur rugby union player. David Duckham, for example, was offered £10,000 to sign for St Helens in 1971, but declined; Mike Burton was offered ‘very close to’ the same amount, by the same club, a year later – with the same result.<sup>210</sup> Various factors, no doubt, contributed to such decisions. Burton, living in Gloucester, mentions the fact that he would not have wanted to uproot his family; Duckham mentions the fact that ‘very few rugby union converts were making the grade’ in league; Rossborough, as quoted above, preferred to stay with his friends and pursue a promising career.<sup>211</sup> There was very little

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<sup>208</sup> Caplan, interview.

<sup>209</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>210</sup> Duckham, interview; Burton, *Never Stay Down*, 141.

<sup>211</sup> Duckham, interview; Burton, *Never Stay Down*, 140.

sense among those interviewed, however, of opposition to rugby league because of a deeply held personal belief in amateurism, or concomitant antipathy to professionalism – as the aforementioned disapproving comments about the divide between the two codes suggest. As John Pullin put it, ‘Someone did say to me once, “Would you like to play rugby league?” I said “no, [but] I wouldn’t mind playing rugby union professionally.”’<sup>212</sup> Those rugby union players who turned down offers to play rugby league, in other words, usually did so because of the unsettling consequences that decision would have had for their lives – not because they strongly believed in the moral rectitude of amateur sport. Rugby union players, it seems, were not as fiercely opposed to their professional counterparts as those in charge of the sport were.

Nonetheless, the divide between union and league remained firmly in place in the 1960s and 1970s and there was little sign of any rapprochement. This contributed to the fact that these decades were a time of growing tension in rugby union between the opposing concepts of amateurism and professionalism. In some senses, rugby union began to loosen its tightly-laced amateur corset in this time. Coaching started to become the norm at the top level, with greater time and mental effort expended on improving performance; official competition rugby was introduced in England for the first time; and money began to flow into the game (and into the pockets of the union) as Twickenham opened its doors to commercial partnerships. In other senses, though, the sport continued to cling to its old traditions, with the separation between league and union as rigidly enforced as ever, players banned from involvement in the game for life for publishing autobiographies, a lingering suspicion of coaching, and, quite simply, no immediate sense of a change in the game’s

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<sup>212</sup> Pullin, interview.

amateur status. As John Pullin put it, ‘you didn’t really think about [playing professionally], because it was never going to happen. It didn’t even look in the foreseeable future.’<sup>213</sup>

This tension between old and new ways of working reflected the wider world of middle-class work in England. There, as in rugby, there were still strong elements of older, more ‘amateur’ traditions – hence Perkin’s description of ‘cultivated amateurism’ in British management, noted in the previous chapter.<sup>214</sup> ‘Work’, said Budge Rogers, ‘was less competitive than it is now ... Firms ... didn’t demand their pound of flesh quite like they do now.’<sup>215</sup> Harold Wilson, indeed, noted the amateurism of British industry in his famous ‘white heat’ speech at the 1963 Labour Party conference, using a sporting example when he decried the fact that ‘at the very time when even the MCC has abolished the distinction between amateur and professional, we are content to remain, in science and industry, a nation of gentlemen in a world of players.’<sup>216</sup>

This ‘gentlemanly’ way of doing things was especially prominent in the City of London, where more relaxed working practices based on social connections and cronyism were still common. As one young stockbroker commented in 1967:

Do I work hard? Well, frankly no. I get down to the office after the rush hour – about 10.15 – and I leave just before it, about four o’clock. Some keen chaps arrive before it and leave after it, but it doesn’t really do them much good ... it’s astonishing the business you can do indirectly by being seen at the right places, like deb dances and so on.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 301.

<sup>215</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain Today*, 94–95.

<sup>217</sup> From Jonathan Aitken’s *The Young Meteors*, quoted in David Kynaston, *City of London: The History* (London: Vintage, 2012), 486.



While this way of working continued to exist, however, there were increasing signs that it was dying out. Kynaston notes that, in the City, while the ‘old school tie’ still held power, modernisation of working practices meant that ‘that undisputed sway was under threat’ by the mid-1960s. He gives the example of Warburgs, an investment bank where ‘lunches were famously abstemious’ and employees worked ‘unheard-of hours’ – and ‘the cult of the all-round, preferably sporting amateur, still a potent force elsewhere in the City, was entirely absent’.<sup>218</sup> Gradually, as Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell note, middle-class work began to be taken over by a culture of ‘presenteeism’, as work ethic intensified and hours at the office increased – a trend which appeared most prominently in the 1980s, but had its roots in the economic shifts of the 1970s.<sup>219</sup> The gentle, ‘amateur’ concept of middle-class work was rapidly disappearing in favour of one more ruled by dedication, professionalism and money – and rugby union, a sport dominated by the middle classes, was beginning to catch up. By the mid-1990s, as will be investigated in the following chapter, it had finally done so.

### **English rugby union and apartheid South Africa**

We saw it with our own eyes. And it was not something I was very comfortable with. But I did not see the point of standing in the way of a nation of sportsmen ... from playing international sport against another country.

*David Duckham, interview.*

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>219</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 203.

One area in which English rugby union's conservative characteristics were highlighted on a very public stage was its relationship with apartheid-era South Africa. The attitudes of the sport and its players towards playing against South Africa, both at home and on tour, at a time when doing so attracted increasing levels of controversy, provide an interesting case study into the societal position of the sport. This controversy first reached a significant level during the 1960s and 1970s, and it is therefore appropriate that the issue is considered in this chapter.

In May 1948, the National Party won control of South Africa following a general election. Under their control – which lasted until the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994 – racial segregation became entrenched and enforced at state level under apartheid. Within that ideological system, the dominant and ruling group were white Afrikaners – an important point with regards to rugby union. Rugby was symbolic of white, male Afrikaner pride, having developed as such mainly in the first half of the twentieth century, assisted by the success of Afrikaner players in a Springbok team that was internationally dominant (especially against British teams). By the time of the National Party's success, rugby had developed from initially being a subject of 'Afrikaner indifference' into something of 'extraordinary cultural and symbolic significance for Afrikaners', and thus of great importance to the ruling elite of the country.<sup>220</sup> It was against this background that the issue of whether or not the rugby world should boycott South Africa in protest at apartheid gradually developed during the post-war era.

England's first encounter with South Africa on a rugby field took place in 1906 – a 3-3 draw at Crystal Palace. The two teams played only twice more prior to the Second World

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<sup>220</sup> Tony Collins, *The Oval World: A Global History of Rugby* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 135; David R. Black and John Nauright, *Rugby and the South African Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 60.

War (in 1913 and 1932), and first met each other in the post-war period in 1952, as part of South Africa's tour of the British Isles and France. By this time, the South African government had passed several pieces of legislation aimed at deepening racial segregation, in what Saul Dubow has called 'the first phase of implementation' of apartheid.<sup>221</sup> Despite this, the situation in South Africa had yet to become a subject of high-profile global concern. In Britain, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which would later be so active in calling for a sporting boycott to be upheld, was only founded towards the end of the 1950s. Prior to that, organised anti-apartheid sentiment in Britain appears to have been relatively insignificant in scale.<sup>222</sup>

When England took the field against the Springboks on 5 January 1952, then, there was little sign of politics standing in the way. No mention can be found in newspapers of the time, for example, of apartheid in relation to the game. Even in such a liberal publication as the *Manchester Guardian*, which would later report extensively on issues surrounding the sporting boycott, the only headlines to be found concerning South Africa during the tour were about the 'high average weight of [their] forwards' or the fact that their 'scrummaging superiority' proved to be decisive in their 8-3 victory over England that January day.<sup>223</sup> Neither Chris Winn nor Ted Woodward, both of whom made their England debuts that day, mentioned anything about political controversy surrounding the game when interviewed – though Winn did discuss apartheid in relation to his visit to South Africa with a combined Oxford and Cambridge University team in the summer of 1951:

In those days the conditions were appalling. And I would say for all of us – if there was anything we could have done... We went up to the manager, who was very

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<sup>221</sup> Saul Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32.

<sup>222</sup> Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A History of the Movement in Britain* (London: The Merlin Press, 2005), 4–8.

<sup>223</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 September 1951; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1952.

sympathetic, and he said ‘I have to tell you that I have a letter from the Foreign Office to say that whatever you may think, you are there to play rugby, and please don’t cause any difficulties.’ I can understand that. But we managed to visit quite a number of the ... areas, where there were a lot of young kids, and we went to sing to them and so on, and we managed to get around a bit.<sup>224</sup>

The British government was, therefore, already aware at this stage of the potential for sport and politics to mix when it came to apartheid. It was, however, during the 1960s that the issue of sporting contact with South Africa became more prominent, both in Britain and around the world. The first major manifestation of this was FIFA’s decision, in 1961, to suspend South Africa from international football – this was followed, three years later, by the decision of the International Olympic Committee to ban South Africa from competing in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (their exclusion continued until the 1992 games in Barcelona).<sup>225</sup>

The Springboks’ next visit to England was in January 1961, where they once again triumphed at Twickenham, this time by five points to nil. Again, there is little evidence of protest around this match or others on the Springboks’ 1960-61 tour. No mention is made of it in the AAM’s extensive online archives (though there is some protest material related to South Africa’s 1960 cricket tour), nor does Peter Hain, architect of the widespread protest which greeted the South Africans when they returned to Britain in 1969-70, mention the 1960-61 tour in his book *Don’t Play With Apartheid*.<sup>226</sup> Instead, only fleeting voices of opposition emerge – such as that of J.C. Hatch, a member of the London Society of Rugby Football Referees (and head of the Commonwealth Department of the Labour

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<sup>224</sup> Winn, interview.

<sup>225</sup> Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*, 54; John Nauright, *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 136–37.

<sup>226</sup> ‘AAM Archives’, accessed 26 July 2016, <http://www.aamarchives.org>; Peter Hain, *Don’t Play With Apartheid: The Background to the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).

Party), who informed the secretary of the RFU that he did not want to be considered as a referee for any matches involving the South Africans due to his belief that ‘any form of participation with teams based on racial discrimination’ amounted to ‘conniving with the apartheid principle’.<sup>227</sup>

It was to be the Springboks’ next visit, in 1969-70, that sparked the first large-scale protest in Britain over rugby contact with South Africa. In 1968, the infamous ‘D’Oliveira affair’ – when England’s cricket tour to South Africa was eventually cancelled following a bitter saga over the selection (and initial non-selection) of Basil D’Oliveira, a mixed-race English player of South African origin – had led to an increased focus on the subject of sport and apartheid.<sup>228</sup> By the time the Springboks arrived in 1969, the AAM had begun to focus their protests more heavily on sport. The ‘Stop the Seventy Tour’ campaign, initially directed at South Africa’s proposed cricket tour to England in 1970, turned its attention to the RFU and the Springboks. As Peter Hain outlines in his aforementioned book, ‘The campaign against the rugby tour started off as a “trial run” for the cricket tour; it turned into a massive expression of anger and opposition.’ Over 50,000 protesters were involved in demonstrations throughout the duration of the tour, with over 400 arrests made and over 20,000 police deployed to confront them. Matches were disrupted again and again, most notoriously at Swansea when demonstrators were violently attacked by ‘stewards’ recruited in advance from local rugby clubs.<sup>229</sup>

The tour continued among all this, and was completed at the end of January with a 21-12 victory over the Barbarians at Twickenham. These few months, though, marked the point at which English rugby’s relations with apartheid South Africa had become more

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<sup>227</sup> *Observer*, 18 October 1960.

<sup>228</sup> Birley, *English Cricket*, 304–5.

<sup>229</sup> Hain, *Don’t Play With Apartheid*, 126; *Ibid.*, 148; *The Times*, 17 November 1969.

than just a debating point for a small number of committed individuals. The issue was now firmly in the spotlight, and would again be on each occasion that English rugby players came up against South African opposition over the next twenty-five years. Though the 1969-70 tour was the last occasion on which an official Springboks team would travel to England before post-apartheid 'acceptance' in 1992, England would visit South Africa on official tours on two occasions during those years – in 1972 and 1984. On both occasions, their visit flew in the face of the growing boycott movement, which had extended to virtually all major sports but rugby (England's cricketers, for example, did not play in an official capacity against South Africa between 1965 and 1994 – though there were 'rebel tours' by English players during the 1980s and early 1990s). Even the Gleneagles Agreement, an agreement by Commonwealth governments in 1977 which gave an official stamp of state approval to the idea of a sporting boycott, did not stop the 1984 tour. Furthermore, the British Lions would also tour South Africa twice in this time, in 1974 and 1980, with a third proposed tour in 1986 eventually cancelled as the extent of political pressure, and the threat of a mass boycott of the 1986 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games, finally became too great.<sup>230</sup>

In fact, rugby union as a whole was more willing than perhaps all other major sports to keep South Africa a part of its international community. Many factors were behind this, not least the fact that South Africa were one of rugby's most powerful nations (unlike, say, in football) and had a long history of being a vital member of rugby's white, Empire-dominated fraternity. As Stephen Jones et al. put it in their book about the British Lions, in a discussion of the controversial 1980 tour to South Africa:

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<sup>230</sup> 'The Gleneagles Agreement on Sporting Contacts with South Africa, 1977', *The Commonwealth*, accessed 27 July 2016, <http://thecommonwealth.org/history-of-the-commonwealth/gleneagles-agreement-starts-apartheid-south-africas-sporting-isolation>.

The bond and the friendships between South African rugby and rugby in Britain and Ireland, not to mention New Zealand, meant that the firmest friendships had been established over the years and some people in rugby clearly felt that to abandon contact with South African rugby would be to renege on a friendship.<sup>231</sup>

Important, though, for the purposes of this research, was the societal position of rugby union. Turning our attention exclusively to England and its players and administrators, rugby's conservative nature meant that, for the most part, it seemed determined to guard the status quo and reluctant to sacrifice what it felt was legitimate amateur sporting competition. Sport, many in rugby union argued, was separate from politics.

The vast majority of players were willing to engage in matches involving South Africa in this period. Active voices against doing so are hard to find (though a handful are considered below). There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First of all, and perhaps paramount for players, were sporting concerns – the desire to be picked for teams, to progress in their career and to play in the biggest matches. Roger Uttley, for example, played for North East Counties against South Africa on the tumultuous 1969-70 tour. He was twenty years old at the time, and playing in his first match against international opposition. He recalled the match thus:

As a student, playing against the South Africans – Jan Ellis, Piet Greyling and Frik du Preez, and Mof Myburgh, big prop – was an eye-opening experience, certainly ... We had a lot of apartheid demonstrations going on outside. But just the opportunity to play against these guys was great.<sup>232</sup>

For a young and ambitious rugby player, being picked for a combined counties side was the next step in a promising career – especially against such high-profile opposition. And, as

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<sup>231</sup> Jones et al., *Behind the Lions*, 271.

<sup>232</sup> Uttley, interview.

players moved further in their careers, the stakes became higher. In an era when selection for England was notoriously volatile, many players dared not risk doing anything that would give those in charge the chance to drop them. Alan Old had just broken into the England team when they were due to tour South Africa in the summer of 1972. He remembered how he felt in advance of the tour:

To begin with it was a bit scary because obviously it was controversial going ... in the apartheid days, and I'd already played against the Springboks when they'd come over here in [1970], and the North East Counties played them and we'd had all sorts of ... demonstrations against it ... So there was a little bit of soul-searching, but you were on your way up and, you know, to have pulled out would've just been to end the career really at that stage in terms of selection.<sup>233</sup>

Similarly John Pullin, who toured South Africa with the British Lions in 1968, said, 'at the time, you're fairly young, you don't think too much about it do you? ... Basically, I was just interested in playing rugby and getting in the Test team. That was my goal at the time.'<sup>234</sup>

When players were operating within a culture that emphasised the purity of sporting competition, the importance of maintaining tradition, and the idea of a 'rugby fraternity' defending itself against disruptive outsiders, it was unlikely that such natural personal desires would be overridden. In terms of being exposed to the other side of the debate, many players did receive letters from those campaigning for a sporting boycott but, coming from the 'outside' as they did, these do not appear to have had a significant impact. Peter Winterbottom, who played on England's 1984 tour to South Africa, said, 'We were getting letters from Peter Hain and people like that. But we just took no notice.'<sup>235</sup> When the England team due to play against South Africa in 1970 received letters from Hain

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<sup>233</sup> Old, interview.

<sup>234</sup> Pullin, interview.

<sup>235</sup> Peter Winterbottom, interview, 8 December 2015.



asking them to withdraw from the match, the team, according to one of the players, Nigel Starmer-Smith, ‘made a big bonfire on a table in the lobby of the hotel and burnt the letters.’ Though, he said, ‘there was a lot of pressure’ on the players, ‘by and large, the rugby people were behind us.’<sup>236</sup> If the majority of people within the sport were emphasising the reasons why they felt contact with South Africa was justified, most players were likely to simply be swept along with their own crowd.

One contributing factor to this, perhaps, was a lack of understanding of the issue at hand. Given that the era in question lacked twenty-four-hour news and instant access to information, many players argue that they simply did not know much about the situation in South Africa. Roger Uttley recalled:

Africa was still a ‘dark’ continent in those days, you didn’t have access the way people have now to all these channels with various programmes about what’s going on out there. [It was] difficult to appreciate apartheid when you’ve never experienced it.<sup>237</sup>

On a similar theme, John Pullin said the following of the 1968 British Lions tour:

I remember before, we met up in London or wherever it was, and the South African ambassador came round and gave us a talk and said, you know, ‘You can’t go out with any black girls,’ that sort of thing, can’t go near them, and laid down the law like that which really, up until then, I wasn’t aware of. Apartheid – I suppose I knew what it meant, but that was about it. But you hadn’t really thought about it. That did bring it home a bit, the fact that, you know, you couldn’t do this, you couldn’t go on the same bus with them, they had different bus stops and you

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<sup>236</sup> Quoted in Collins, *Social History*, 180.

<sup>237</sup> Uttley, interview.

couldn't go on there, that was a black one only. No, until I was told that, you weren't aware of it.<sup>238</sup>

Whatever the extent of information players did or did not have about apartheid, it seems as though certain arguments were developed within the game to justify visiting, and competing against, South Africa. These arguments are of interest because of what they tell us about a distinct culture within the sport, and the way in which it positioned itself with regards to the sporting boycott debate. One of the most common was that players wanted to make their own mind up about South Africa by seeing the situation first-hand. As Peter Rossborough put it, 'The RFU took the attitude that they would not listen to what people said, they would go to South Africa and see for themselves what it was all about' – which echoes the position adopted by Uttley when he mentioned in the quotation above that it was 'difficult to appreciate apartheid when you've never experienced it.'<sup>239</sup> David Duckham, in his 1980 autobiography *Dai for England*, also followed this line, stating that 'the extremist viewpoint against racial discrimination cannot be proffered with any degree of justification unless the parties concerned have witnessed the scene themselves and experienced local feeling.'<sup>240</sup>

Once England players were in South Africa, though, it is unlikely they received a particularly balanced picture of the effects of apartheid, given that their hosts were a white-only rugby governing body operating a racially segregated sport. Duckham went on to describe a visit, on a 1969 tour with the Barbarians, to a farm owned by a former Springbok player. Here, he said, the players were able to 'communicate freely' with the farm's black servants, 'and their reception was warm and friendly. A situation of peaceful

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<sup>238</sup> Pullin, interview.

<sup>239</sup> Rossborough, interview; Uttley, interview.

<sup>240</sup> David Duckham, *Dai for England: The Autobiography of David Duckham* (London: Pelham, 1980), 67.

coexistence seemed, and I do stress the word “seemed”, to abound.<sup>241</sup> Budge Rogers, who toured South Africa with the British Lions in 1962, described his experiences thus:

*BR:* I only read relatively recently, ten years ago say, the first of Mandela’s biographies, and realised he was at the height of his terrorism during that Lions tour. And we never read about it, never heard about it.

*Interviewer:* So in general, how aware were the players of the situation?

*BR:* Hardly at all. We were aware of apartheid – [it] couldn’t [appear] more pronounced than [playing] in a stadium and [seeing that] the blacks are all at one end. And, you know, toilets were black and white – oh, you were very aware of it in a sort of superficial way. But it didn’t impact much on your general life in the place.

Indeed, as Rogers also commented, white, rugby-playing visitors to South Africa were treated very favourably – ‘you got rich white people who could say to five of you after a match, “Come back to our place for a barbecue”’.<sup>242</sup> Gary Pearce, who toured South Africa with England in 1984, echoes this, saying that ‘you were welcomed by the rugby fraternity over there with open arms. I mean they looked after us, they would pay our bar bills.’<sup>243</sup> Those involved with South African rugby were, of course, desperate to encourage contact in a widely hostile sporting world.

Another of the common arguments from within rugby was that sport and politics should remain separate. This well-worn idea, linked as it is to amateur sporting traditions, found perhaps its most fervent preacher in the still-amateur sport of rugby – particularly so when it came to apartheid. The concept was regularly used in defence of contact with South Africa. It was a view outlined by Duckham in his autobiography: ‘Sport is sport and

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>243</sup> Pearce, interview.

it should be there for sport's sake. How desperately sad it is that sport at international level has become the arena for political intrigue, often resulting in the prevention of sportsmen and sportswomen from participating in something which is, after all, their own chosen pursuit.<sup>244</sup> It was also a view that could be regularly heard in rugby circles. Former Irish and British Lions international Andrew Mulligan, for example, who had just returned from South Africa in his role as a broadcaster with BBC television's *Panorama*, recalled attending a dinner in London to mark the final match of the 1969-70 Springbok tour:

One's main sin seemed to have been not to have an opinion, but to have declared it. It was disturbing to find that it was easier to discuss openly multi-racial sport with a former Springbok than it was with my British contemporaries. All the old arguments about sport and politics were aired including a plea for understanding of apartheid.<sup>245</sup>

This idea also appears in the present-day testimony of rugby players. The previously quoted Duckham retains his belief in the separation of sport and politics, stating that 'the old adage, "sport and politics don't mix" – well I think it's true. They're poles apart. They have nothing to do with each other, theoretically.'<sup>246</sup> Gary Pearce commented that it was an idea that he believed in when he went to tour South Africa in 1984, recalling:

To me it was like – separate sport from politics. Although these days they are intertwined, and I'm aware of that. But in those days no, you're picked to play for your country, they're going, so you're going with them.

(Evident here, again, is the personal, sporting desire to achieve – to fulfil what Pearce called 'a dream come true' and play for his country against one of the world's top teams).<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Duckham, *Dai for England*, 68.

<sup>245</sup> *Observer*, 8 February 1970.

<sup>246</sup> Duckham, interview.

<sup>247</sup> Pearce, interview.

Some within rugby were also sceptical of the good that a boycott would do. Alan Old, in discussing travelling to South Africa with the 1974 British Lions, argued that ‘as young sportsmen, what you were trying to do was be positive, not negative, and negative would’ve been: “No, I’m not doing anything.” Because nothing would’ve happened, they would’ve still gone on without you.’ He also believes that the successful 1974 team, who went unbeaten on their tour, ‘gave great heart to the coloured and black communities, who loved to see the white South African supremacy blown away.’<sup>248</sup> In his 1990 book *Cooch*, England prop forward Gareth Chilcott stated that ‘contact at a sporting level is where we might be able to influence the thinking of young South Africans ... I have never thought that to stop talking was a good way to resolve differences.’<sup>249</sup> Nowhere was the opinion that sporting contact with South Africa was a force for good more prominent, though, than in the testimony of Micky Steele-Bodger. As Chairman of the Four Home Unions Tours Committee, he played a leading role in organising two controversial tours – the invitation to a mixed-race South African Barbarians team to tour Britain in 1979, and the decision to send the British Lions to South Africa in 1980. When the South African Barbarians tour was announced in August 1979, the committee stated (of rugby’s policy in general):

Over the years, the home rugby unions have adhered to a policy of ‘continuing contact’, firmly convinced that internal changes in the administration of the game in South Africa would be more likely to come from communication rather than from threats.<sup>250</sup>

Steele-Bodger retains that belief today, as outlined in his interview testimony:

I was perhaps considered naïve because I said that I thought that sport transcended most things and that you were getting nowhere by putting an embargo on it,

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<sup>248</sup> Old, interview.

<sup>249</sup> Gareth Chilcott, *Cooch: Mr Chilcott to You* (London: Johnsons Publishing, 1990), 67–68.

<sup>250</sup> *Guardian*, 28 August 1979.

because you just preserve what was there. And the best way to change it was to go and see for yourself.

He felt that rugby contact with South Africa ‘made a difference’ and brought about ‘change for the better’: ‘I think rugby did its bit and I was very keen that we should do, to encourage normality, and it worked,’ he stated.<sup>251</sup>

Many others argued to the contrary. Opposition was voiced to both the visit of the 1979 South African Barbarians – whose artificially enforced multi-racial composition was criticised as mere window-dressing rather than genuine evidence of increased racial integration – and to the 1980 British Lions tour.<sup>252</sup> Hector Monro, the Minister for Sport, pointed to the fact that the tours contravened Britain’s commitment to the Gleneagles Agreement, and also to the prospect of endangering Britain’s participation in the 1980 Olympic Games.<sup>253</sup> Despite verbal denouncement of both tours, though, the Conservative government did not stop either tour from going ahead. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was criticised for not taking a firmer stance, while her husband Denis – a former rugby referee – openly supported the 1980 tour, telling the annual dinner of the London Society of Rugby Football Union Referees: ‘we are a free people, playing an amateur game, and we have got the right to play where we like’.<sup>254</sup> The prime minister was nominally against the 1980 Lions tour, but Steele-Bodger did not receive any direct instructions from her to cancel it:

Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister. She had to say what she had to say, but she was married to Denis Thatcher, who was a very good referee, nearly international standard, and he of course was ‘pro’ the tour ... and he must’ve

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<sup>251</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>252</sup> *Guardian*, 28 August 1979; *Guardian*, 28 September 1979.

<sup>253</sup> *The Times*, 15 November 1979.

<sup>254</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1979.

influenced her ... I'd spoken to Denis about it, he said, 'She will have to say she doesn't want us to go – but she won't stop you.'<sup>255</sup>

The tour, indeed, had the support of a number of Conservative MPs, with over seventy backbenchers signing a Commons motion urging the government to formally approve it.<sup>256</sup> It was a strong indication of the place the sport tended to occupy on the political spectrum.

With the approval of all four home unions, the 1980 Lions tour went ahead. It also had the support of Albert Ferrasse, Chairman of the French Rugby Federation and soon to be Chairman of the International Rugby Board, who used that familiar phrase as he stated: 'It is a courageous decision. It is a very good thing that one does not mix sports and politics.'<sup>257</sup> Indeed, among this prevailing 'rugby mindset', there were few outliers. There were, however, occasions when individuals within rugby – such as Andrew Mulligan, mentioned above – did take a different view to the majority of their peers. Perhaps the most famous case of this was that of John Taylor, the Welsh flanker, who visited South Africa with the British Lions in 1968 and subsequently came out in support of the boycott, refusing to play against South Africa during their 1969-70 tour.<sup>258</sup> In terms of English players, Peter Rossborough took a similar, if less high-profile, stance. His first experience of the issue was on the 1969-70 tour, when, as a twenty-one-year-old, he was selected to play for Midland Counties West against the Springboks at Coventry's Coundon Road ground:

I have to say that my political consciousness was not – my awareness was not as great then as it soon became ... I didn't even think about political things, I just thought well – fantastic, I'm playing against South Africa, I'm representing the

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<sup>255</sup> Steele-Bodger, interview.

<sup>256</sup> *The Times*, 8 December 1979.

<sup>257</sup> *The Times*, 5 January 1980.

<sup>258</sup> *Guardian*, 5 November 1969.

Midlands – I just went and did it. I remember driving up to Coundon Road in my mum’s Hillman Imp on the day of the match, and as I came across the old level crossing ... there were tens of thousands of protesters outside the ground, and as I drove through they were all banging on top of the car, kicking it and this sort of thing. They invaded the pitch during the game, they threw drawing pins all over the pitch to try and get it stopped and so on. And whilst I was proud to play in that game, I realised afterwards – and I did some pretty quick growing up – that I shouldn’t have done.<sup>259</sup>

Almost ten years later, Rossborough was picked for Coventry, his club side, to play against the 1979 South African Barbarians team. This time, he declined:

Coventry actually had a game against a touring South African team ... I was picked for it, and didn’t play, purely because it would have let down so many of the students I was teaching ... At that stage I had grown up, become a little bit more aware politically and withdrew from the team.<sup>260</sup>

Rossborough’s initial experiences fit with the idea, discussed above, of being picked for a team and wanting to play in a match for personal, sporting reasons. They also fit with the notion of a lack of political awareness. Where he differed, however, from many other players is that his views changed, to the point that he actively refused to play against a South African side for political reasons. The reasons for his apparently anomalous stance became clearer when he discussed politics in general – he is a ‘staunch republican’, and stated during his testimony: ‘I won’t tell you how far left I am, but it’s far enough down that road.’ Rossborough’s political views, therefore, do not fit the traditional rugby mould.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Rossborough, interview.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.



There are some other examples to be found of English players who actively voiced opinions against contact with South Africa, or declined to play for political reasons. The 1984 tour saw Ralph Knibbs, a young black centre from Bristol, turn down a place in the squad because of opposition to apartheid. Perhaps had more black players been involved in English rugby over the years, more anti-apartheid voices would have been heard within the game. Knibbs, however, had he gone to South Africa and been capped that year, would have become the first black player to play for England since James Peters in 1906 (something eventually achieved by Chris Oti in 1988).<sup>262</sup> The first black England players to visit South Africa would in fact be Victor Ubogu, Steve Ojomoh, Adedayo Adebayo and Paul Hull, on the post-apartheid 1994 tour.<sup>263</sup>

Knibbs was the only player whose stated reason for not touring in 1984 was related to the political situation. Stuart Barnes, though, has subsequently indicated that this was the main reason he also did not tour in 1984. Barnes stayed in England to complete his final examinations at Oxford, and this was the official reason given for his absence from the squad. In his 1994 autobiography, however, and in subsequent interviews, he has indicated that he was opposed to the tour ‘under any circumstances’, and has elaborated on his opposition to rugby’s contact with apartheid South Africa.<sup>264</sup> In his book, he is scathing of the RFU on this subject, writing that ‘the imperial disregard for all matters moral ensured that the Rugby Football Union found the racist regime acceptable’. He also writes:

[English rugby union] is a game that is certainly controlled and often supported by the greedy and self-interested. Labour voters and republicans would find it

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<sup>262</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 102.

<sup>263</sup> Ubogu described this tour, which took place in the aftermath of the election of Nelson Mandela, as ‘an awesome experience’. As a black front-row forward, he recalled relishing the chance to perform well in South Africa, as ‘in South Africa they just didn’t think blacks were strong enough to play in the front row.’ Victor Ubogu, interview, 15 April 2016.

<sup>264</sup> Stuart Barnes, *Smelling of Roses: A Rugby Life* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1994), 86; *Independent*, 7 November 2004.

extremely difficult to fill one row of seats at an England international ... Rooted in this background it is understandable that rugby union has been such an obvious ally to South Africa over the years ... Players have undoubtedly been at fault and yet it is harder for individuals to reach a moral position than for an institution. The greater, and longer-term, blame is clearly directed towards the rugby Establishment itself.<sup>265</sup>

Critical voices were otherwise very rare within rugby circles, though, and had been throughout the apartheid era. When South Africa were 'officially' accepted back into international rugby in 1992 – in reality, they had never been entirely excluded from it – and played against England at Twickenham, many detected a sense of relief and even enthusiasm on the part of the rugby 'establishment'.<sup>266</sup> Sir Peter Yarranton, Chairman of the Sports Council and a former England player and RFU president, gave a speech over the public address system warmly welcoming the South Africans – an action that was heavily criticised, and consequently described by journalists as implying 'that South Africa should never have been away' and as amounting 'almost to an apologia for the old South Africa'.<sup>267</sup>

As mentioned above, in 1994 England would go on to visit South Africa for the first time in the post-apartheid era, and would return again in 1995 for the World Cup. The controversy attached to touring and playing against South Africa had now passed, and

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<sup>265</sup> Barnes, *Smelling of Roses*, 87. Barnes did, in fact, end up touring South Africa with England in 1994. During the tour, he used one of his regular columns for the *Daily Telegraph* to label Bloemfontein a 'home-grown Fourth Reich', and to lament the fact that the Orange Free State's victory over England would 'convince them of the superiority of their master race, despite their electoral setback.' Ian Beer, President of the RFU at the time, was forced to send a letter of apology to Orange Free State officials. *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1994; Barnes, *Smelling of Roses*, 191.

<sup>266</sup> Even after Gleneagles, there were several instances of top-level opposition competing with South Africa – whether officially or unofficially. To give a few examples aside from the tours and matches already mentioned, France toured South Africa in 1980 and Ireland did so in 1981; South Africa toured New Zealand in 1981; several matches were played against a 'South American Jaguars' team between 1980 and 1984; England toured in 1984; and despite the cancellation of a proposed 1985 tour by New Zealand, an unofficial 'New Zealand Cavaliers' team toured in 1986. Even though South Africa were excluded from the World Cups of 1987 and 1991, an IRB-sanctioned World XV played two Tests against the Springboks, in Cape Town and Johannesburg, in the summer of 1989.

<sup>267</sup> *The Times*, 16 November 1992; *Observer*, 29 November 1992.

English rugby union was free of the disapproval and controversy it had faced for so long. But the previous forty years or so – particularly from the 1969-70 tour onwards – had demonstrated that, even in the face of large-scale opposition and alone in the wider sporting world, those involved in the sport had still been prepared to stubbornly continue their relationship with South Africa. This illustrates many of the characteristics of the game and its players that have been presented so far in this thesis – particularly the conservative nature of the sport and the existence within it of an insider culture, or a ‘fraternity of rugby’. It shows that rugby’s traditionalism and resistance to change continued well into the post-war era. Of any of the ways that the game could be accused of being out of step with societal progression in this time, its relationship with apartheid South Africa was perhaps the clearest one.

## Conclusion

In 1962, the journalist Anthony Sampson published *Anatomy of Britain*, a book which aimed to explore the fabric of the country and its inner workings, and to attempt to find out ‘who runs it and how, how they got there, and how they are changing.’<sup>268</sup> It became the first in a series of accounts, with the second and third instalments, *Anatomy of Britain Today* and *New Anatomy of Britain*, following in 1965 and 1971 respectively.<sup>269</sup> A major theme running through Sampson’s depictions of 1960s and early 1970s Britain was that of the old world and the new – the tension between a land ruled by old money and the ‘old school tie’, and

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<sup>268</sup> Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*.

<sup>269</sup> Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain Today*; Sampson, *New Anatomy*.

by the increasing influence of a ‘new boy net’ of modernising specialists. It was a ‘battle’ that Sampson frequently characterised as one ‘between amateurs and professionals’.<sup>270</sup>

By his third book, Sampson believed ‘the professional’ was ‘in the ascendant’.<sup>271</sup> Even in classic strongholds of the amateur ideal, such as the House of Commons and the civil service, professional ideas were beginning to hold sway. He gives the example of MPs’ salaries:

[T]he amateur principle until recently guided MPs’ attitudes to their own salaries. It was not until 1911 ... that members were paid at all ... The government agreed in 1964 that members should be paid £3,250, with £1,250 of it allowable as expenses ... [They] are allowed such perks as free telephone calls to the rest of London; free first-class travel to their constituency; a car allowance; and free House of Commons writing paper.

These changes, he argued, ‘implied that members should nowadays be regarded as full-time employees, not as half-time amateurs with proper jobs outside.’<sup>272</sup> While the professionals were winning the battle, though, and the conflict between amateur and professional seemed to Sampson to be becoming less and less prominent by the early 1970s, this did not mean that the old amateur world had faded away completely. As he wrote in 1971:

The network of common schools, colleges or regiments, of country-house weekends and dinner parties still provides an effective bush-telegraph, a means of quick brokerage, of mutual support and contacts. Even though the amateur had

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<sup>270</sup> Sampson, *New Anatomy*, xvii.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

been in decline and the professional in the ascendant, there is still scope for the people who can bridge the different worlds.<sup>273</sup>

The influence of the amateur ideal had not, in other words, drifted away from English life just yet.

The 1960s that Sampson portrayed have since been characterised in popular memory as a time of great, modernising change, while the 1970s, ‘to take the most commonly used metaphor’, as Andy Beckett has written, were a time when ‘the great party of the sixties ended and the hangover set in.’<sup>274</sup> This view has generally been presented by historians and commentators in recent times as simplistic, however. The 1960s, though to some extent, as Arthur Marwick argued, a time of ‘social and cultural transformation’, also saw elements of social conservatism, and society retained strong remnants of pre- and immediate post-war attitudes.<sup>275</sup> As Jenny Diski has written, with great turn of phrase, ‘The Fifties, that long gasp after the end of the war, when so much had been damaged and so little had been mended, did not expire until the Sixties were well on in years’.<sup>276</sup>

Dominic Sandbrook has perhaps been the most prominent recent critic of the popular view of the 1960s, arguing that ‘the common vision of Britain in the 1960s as a country of dope-smoking, Beatles-loving free-love addicts’ is ‘a bit of caricature’, and pointing out that this view ‘exaggerat[es] the changes of the period at the expense of the continuities’.<sup>277</sup> Brian Harrison, in an essay on the ‘historiographical hazards’ of the 1960s, points out that in a Gallup poll of 1965, when asked ‘whether schools should require boys to keep their hair cut short, the noes were outnumbered by 5 to 1’. Similarly, while the

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>274</sup> Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 209.

<sup>275</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 801.

<sup>276</sup> Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 4.

<sup>277</sup> Sandbrook, *State of Emergency*, 10; Sandbrook, ‘Ultimate Adventures’, 68.

Beatles' album *Please Please Me* 'was in the top ten for forty-three weeks, *South Pacific* was in the top place for forty-six'.<sup>278</sup> The cultural revolution had its limits.

The popular view of the 1970s as 'a time when the rebellious energies of the sixties cooled and dissipated' has also been challenged. Andy Beckett, in *When the Lights Went Out*, suggests that 'for many politicized Britons ... [the 1970s were] when the great sixties party actually got started', pointing out, in particular, feminist and gay rights activity during the decade.<sup>279</sup> Similarly, Sandbrook suggests that 'many of the things we associate with the 1960s only gathered momentum in the first half of the following decade' – but again, points out above all that 'for most people, daily life never approached the extremes often commemorated in histories of the 1970s'.<sup>280</sup> Once again, this was a time of both change and continuity.

Where did the sport of rugby union and its players sit among all this? In many ways, they reflected this mixture of change and continuity, and reflected the world that Sampson portrayed. By the end of this period, rugby too was caught in a conflict between tradition and modernisation, the old and the new, and – the ultimate battle, as far as the soul of the sport was concerned – amateurism and professionalism. In many senses, rugby union continued to operate as it always had done. There was little meaningful change in the educational background of those who played and ran the game, especially at the highest level, and rugby remained strongly linked to private and grammar schools. The sport also remained overwhelmingly middle-class, while there were draconian punishments for anyone who dared to contravene certain amateur rules. Furthermore, the conservative

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<sup>278</sup> Brian Harrison, 'Historiographical Hazards of Sixties Britain', in *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 33.

<sup>279</sup> Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 209.

<sup>280</sup> Sandbrook, *State of Emergency*, 10–11.

nature of rugby union was demonstrated by its stance on the sporting boycott of apartheid South Africa. Perhaps most importantly of all, rugby union players remained, to borrow a phrase from Sampson, ‘half-time amateurs with proper jobs outside’.<sup>281</sup>

In other ways, however, a greater amount of change was apparent in the sport than had been in the previous decade-and-a-half of the post-war era. By the end of the 1970s, there was a definite sense that rugby was modernising; it was moving into an era of corporate sponsorships, boot deals, increased focus on training and performance and greater competitive intensity. These developments led sociologists Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, to declare that by the end of the 1970s, top-level rugby union had ‘become, to all intents and purposes, a professional sport.’ They also declared the following:

Indeed, apart from ideological amateurism, the only remaining differences between [rugby union] and, say, professional soccer, are that top-level players are not paid, at least not openly, that they have full-time occupations outside rugby, and that they claim, in the majority of cases quite sincerely, allegiance to amateur principles.<sup>282</sup>

These were, though, more substantial caveats than Dunning and Sheard seemed to believe. Reinforced by the class and educational background of the sport, these ‘amateur principles’ – held, in fact, more strongly by those in charge of the sport than by those playing it – still carried significant weight, and would prevent the arrival of professional rugby union for another sixteen years. It was in these coming years, characterised so often by the influence of wealth, that the flow of money would become too strong for the floodgates of amateurism. For now, though, even if the first whispers of a professional future were

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<sup>281</sup> Sampson, *New Anatomy*, 9.

<sup>282</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 199–200.

beginning to be heard, rugby union essentially remained, in the words of David Duckham, a 'Saturday afternoon pursuit'.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Duckham, interview.



## Chapter Four

### Change? 1980-1995

#### Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis opened with a description of England's first post-war match. It took place in November 1945, in front of 30,000 spectators at Twickenham. The opponents were New Zealand – or, rather, a New Zealand Army touring XV. A somewhat makeshift England side – the best available given that the war was not long over – lost the game 18-3. Just under fifty years later, England's final match of the post-war amateur era took place, and was also against New Zealand. The circumstances of it would have shocked even the most forward-thinking onlooker in 1945. This was the semi-final of the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Such a tournament was a once unthinkable idea for amateur purists, but the competition had, by now, reached its third instalment. The tournament was attended by a total of 1.1 million spectators, was watched by 2.3 billion people on television in 124 different countries, and generated a profit of £17.6 million.<sup>1</sup> On 18 June at Newlands Stadium in Cape Town, 51,000 spectators watched as Jonah Lomu, a giant New Zealand winger who weighed several stones more than the average prop forward would have done in 1945, sensationally scored four tries in a 45-29 win over England.<sup>2</sup> This was rugby union in the modern age, a far cry from the wooden seats of a chilly Twickenham fifty years earlier. For all the television cameras, sponsorship deals and global star players, however,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Financing the Global Game', *IRB Year in Review 2012*, accessed 22 September 2017, <https://images.worldrugby.org/view-item?i=38261>.

<sup>2</sup> 'ESPN Scrum Statsguru', accessed 19 August 2015, <http://stats.espnscrum.com/statsguru/rugby/stats/index.html>.

one thing remained the same: the sport being played was still – just about – an amateur one.

This chapter will deal with the final phase of amateur rugby union – the 1980s and early 1990s. Whereas the 1960s and 1970s had been a transitional time for the sport, as the game moved into the 1980s and 1990s the march towards professionalism became ever quicker, the end-point ever more inevitable. This chapter will therefore cover the progression of the themes raised in the previous chapter relating to the coming of professionalism, such as money, increased training and time dedicated to the game by players, and increased competition in the game. This era of British history, dominated by the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, is often characterised by a newfound lust for money, an emphasis on individualism, and the ‘triumph of the market philosophy’.<sup>3</sup> As Jeremy Paxman put it in 1991, ‘Hospitals, art galleries, bowls clubs, churches and nursery schools suddenly began to spout about margins and profit centres ... Margaret Thatcher attempted to bring the disciplines of commerce to every corner of national life’.<sup>4</sup> Even rugby union, one of the last great bastions of a bygone amateur ethos, was eventually powerless to resist this societal shift. As the weight of money and modernisation became too much to bear, the amateur edifice finally collapsed.

While the game undoubtedly changed in those areas, though, how far did it change in others? This chapter will continue the exploration of English rugby union’s social foundations, looking again at its relationship with both education and class. Again, there are elements of both change and continuity to be found. Though more state-educated players wore the red rose in this era than likely ever had done before, the middle-class core

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<sup>3</sup> Morgan, *Britain Since 1945*, 438.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Paxman, *Friends in High Places: Who Runs Britain?* (London: Penguin, 1991), x.

of the sport remained intact, reflected in particular by the occupations of its amateur players. In a time in which the ‘classless society’ became a buzz-phrase, rugby union remained classless only in self-image, changing with the fortunes of the middle-class, rather than breaking recognisably free from its historical social foundations.

## Education

It was a rugby school.

*Jonathan Webb, interview.*

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that a certain democratisation of rugby had followed from extensive changes in both secondary and higher education, but that the sport retained its traditional power base in private and grammar schools in the 1960s and 1970s. To what extent did this change in the 1980s and early 1990s? To begin exploring rugby’s relationship with education in this period, it is instructive first to survey the educational landscape more generally. The predominant trend in secondary schooling in the 1980s continued to be the rise of comprehensive schooling and the concomitant decline of grammar schools, as previously approved plans for comprehensivisation continued to come to fruition. Despite the hostility of many on the right, the number of pupils in comprehensive schools had continued to rise sharply throughout the 1970s, and as Graham Stewart has put it, Thatcher’s governments in the 1980s ‘did little to turn back the tide in favour of grammar schools’.<sup>5</sup> By 1975, almost 69 per cent of all secondary pupils

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<sup>5</sup> Stewart, *Bang!*, 468.

in maintained schools in England were at comprehensive schools – by 1990, that figure had reached 86 per cent. These figures represented a steep rise from the 10 per cent of pupils in comprehensives in 1965. At the same time, there was a striking decrease in the proportion of secondary school children at grammar schools. The mid-1960s had been the height of grammar school strength; in 1965, a quarter of all secondary pupils in maintained schools in England attended grammar schools. By the end of the 1980s, this had fallen away drastically – in 1990, the figure stood at just 4 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

Another pertinent theme in secondary education was the continued survival and strength of private schooling. This came under periodic threat from Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s, though little action was ultimately taken. Though a Public Schools Commission was set up in the mid-1960s, its resulting report was ‘ignored by the cabinet’ after recommending a compromise solution that ‘satisfied no-one’.<sup>7</sup> Later, despite the Shadow Education Minister, Roy Hattersley, stating in 1973 that it was Labour’s ‘serious intention to reduce, and eventually to abolish private education in this country’, little was done by the Wilson and Callaghan governments of the mid-to-late 1970s.<sup>8</sup> The one serious change affecting the independent sector was the abolition of direct grant schools in 1975, which were given the option to join the comprehensive system or become independent; of the 154 direct grant schools that existed at the time, 103 chose the latter option.<sup>9</sup>

Labour’s 1979 manifesto once again threatened an end to private schooling in Britain, stating that if elected, the party aimed to ‘end, as soon as possible, fee-paying in such schools’ and remove their ‘public subsidies and public support’.<sup>10</sup> Election results,

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<sup>6</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 199.

<sup>7</sup> Paxman, *Friends in High Places*, 163.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Simon, *Education*, 439.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Stewart, *Bang!*, 37.

however, did not allow a chance to see whether they would act meaningfully on such statements. Under the successive Conservative governments of the 1980s, the private school sector – safe in the hands of a government committed to the mantra of parental choice and benefiting, perhaps, from the fact that ‘the resources available to the wealthy increased’ in this time – not only survived, but increased in relative size.<sup>11</sup> While the percentage of the secondary school population in England who attended private schools had declined slightly in the 1960s and 1970s, it rose from 6 per cent in 1980 to 7 per cent in 1990.<sup>12</sup>

Where, then, was rugby union situated among all of this? As in the two previous chapters, it is interesting to survey the educational composition of the England team in this period, and to compare the figures to those quoted above of the population at large. Between 1980 and professionalisation in 1995, ninety-nine players made their debuts for England. Details of secondary education could be found for ninety-six of them. Of these, 35 per cent had attended a non-selective state school, 21 per cent had attended a grammar school, and 46 per cent had attended a private school. In comparison to previous decades, these figures demonstrate an interesting shift. The three corresponding figures for the 1960s and 1970s were 17 per cent for non-selective state, 43 per cent for grammar and 41 per cent for private. In the 1980s and early 1990s, therefore, there was a significant increase (of 18 per cent) in the proportion of England players who had been educated at non-selective state schools.<sup>13</sup>

This increase is an indication of a partial democratisation of the sport at school level. It was shown in the previous chapter that the 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in the

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<sup>11</sup> Jones, *Education in Britain*, 112.

<sup>12</sup> Bolton, ‘Education’, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Appendix Two.

number of state schools playing rugby, and this appears to have continued in the 1980s – between 1980 and 1990, the number of state schools affiliated to the RFU increased from 1,063 to 1,704.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult, of course, to measure the extent to which these increases had a direct effect on the composition of the England team, but it would be fair to assume that the greater amount of state schools playing the sport from the 1960s onwards, and the subsequent increases in the percentage of state-schooled England players do, to some extent, go hand in hand. This was not, though, a simple case of rugby becoming ever more class-neutral as time progressed. The sport's educational background was still far from classless. Indeed it was further, even, from being classless than these schooling figures initially suggest. Once more, such figures must be considered in the context of both the changing educational landscape and the population as a whole. Taking this approach, the increase in the percentage of non-selective state-schooled players and the sharp decrease in the proportion of grammar school-educated players appear less striking. As mentioned above, changes in the secondary school system had led to a significant decline in the number of grammar schools in England and an increase in the number of comprehensives. The proportion of public sector pupils in England that were at grammar schools dipped from 18 per cent in 1970 to 3 per cent in 1980, and hovered between 3 and 4 per cent throughout the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> When viewed in this context, the fact that 21 per cent of England debutants between 1980 and 1995 attended grammar schools looks less like an indicator of a shift away from such schools, and more like further evidence of their disproportionate representation within the sport. The same can be said of the increased percentage of non-selective state-schooled players – 35 per cent does not appear so striking when set against

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<sup>14</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 219.

<sup>15</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 199.

the 82 per cent of English public sector pupils in such schools in 1970, or the 97 per cent in 1985.<sup>16</sup>

While the shifts in the educational backgrounds of England players can perhaps partly be put down to democratisation of the sport at secondary school level, then, the main explanation for them appears to lie in broader societal trends. It was tempting to believe that the sport was becoming far more inclusive of different types of school – England player Damian Hopley stated in 1996 that he was no longer able to think of a full team of players who had been to private schools.<sup>17</sup> In reality, though, a significant proportion of top-level rugby players in the 1980s and 1990s had been privately educated – just as had been the case throughout the game’s history. As stated above, 46 per cent of England debutants between 1980 and 1995 had attended private secondary schools – once again, a percentage that is strikingly higher than that of the population at large (the percentage of the secondary school population who were at private schools fluctuated between roughly 6 and 7 per cent in the 1980s and early 1990s).<sup>18</sup>

Another reason to be wary of declaring an increase in educational equality in the sport is the fact, discussed in the previous chapter, that the numbers of different types of schools playing the sport do not necessarily equate to proportional influence within it. While a greater number of comprehensive or secondary modern schools may have been playing rugby, the sport’s power base, as ever, lay in grammar and private schools. The school rugby experience of Jason Leonard, who played for England between 1990 and 2004, is indicative of this. He attended Warren Comprehensive School in east London in the early 1980s. The school did play rugby, but Leonard writes that ‘there was little interest’

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 230.

<sup>18</sup> Bolton, ‘Education’, 17.

in it, with football taking priority. Rugby, he comments, ‘was seen as a sport for posh kids and those with a public school education.’<sup>19</sup> Leonard also notes the low standing of the school in the local representative system:

Mickey Eyres, a teacher at Chadwell Heath who also played prop at Barking Rugby Club, remembered seeing me and realizing that I was a naturally talented player who would just go to waste in the school system. I played some local matches for the school side and was invited to go to area trials, which resulted in me playing Barking and Essex representative matches, but Mickey was right – I didn’t go far in the school system because I wasn’t at a rugby school ... I don’t think a kid coming from Warren Comprehensive, at that time, stood much of a chance.<sup>20</sup>

The phrase ‘a rugby school’ is telling here. Simply having a rugby team did not make a school ‘a rugby school’ – the phrase denotes a particular tradition of, and devotion of resources to, the sport. Most schools that satisfied such criteria were grammar or private schools.

The school rugby experience of Martin Johnson, whose England career began in the amateur era (in 1993) and ended in the professional (in 2003), sums up the unreliable nature of rugby strength at non-selective state schools. At eleven, he started at Welland Park school in Market Harborough, ‘where they fielded a strong school XV’. ‘If you were any good and you wanted to play’, he recalled in his autobiography, ‘there were school teams throughout the age groups, with matches on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings’.<sup>21</sup> When he moved, however, to Robert Smyth School, the upper school in the town (Leicestershire operated a three-tier school system of lower, middle and upper schools), the experience was different. ‘While we played rugby in PE and between houses,’

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<sup>19</sup> Jason Leonard, *Jason Leonard: The Autobiography* (London: CollinsWillow, 2001), 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Johnson, *Martin Johnson: The Autobiography* (London: Headline, 2003), 17.



he writes, ‘there wasn’t much of a school team at Robert Smyth’.<sup>22</sup> Where rugby was played at comprehensive schools, the seriousness with which it was taken seems to have varied.

The real power at school level still lay overwhelmingly in private schools (and those grammar schools that still existed). Jonathan Webb, who played for England between 1987 and 1993, attended the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle in the late 1970s and early 1980s – a school that transferred from direct grant to independent status during his time there. ‘At RGS you only played rugby for both terms, and then cricket or athletics in the summer,’ he remembered, commenting that it was ‘a rugby school’. The school’s first XV coach at the time was John Elders, who had coached England between 1971 and 1974. They played fixtures against ‘northern schools like Sedbergh, Durham, Barnard Castle ... Bradford, Whitehaven, some of the Edinburgh schools ... Ampleforth ... probably three-quarters [of the school’s fixtures] would be independent schools’.<sup>23</sup> John Mallett, one of the last players to make his England debut in the amateur era (he did so during the 1995 Rugby World Cup), had a similar school rugby experience. He attended the private Millfield School, and also played rugby at prep school prior to starting there. He remembered that, prior to starting at Millfield, ‘the school had said that generally Millfield was very competitive on the sporting front, and whilst I was keen on my rugby, it would be difficult to be thinking about getting into the best teams.’ Mallett is now the director of rugby at his old school, and commented:

I’m very aware now, and I probably was a little bit then, that Millfield has a rich culture [of rugby] – it’s the school of Gareth Edwards and international rugby players since then. Chris Oti was here, had just been here, as I came ... It was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>23</sup> Webb, interview.

pretty significant. And to me, in my world, it seemed like that's what everyone did, and all the boys played rugby, so it was pretty central to school life.<sup>24</sup>

This is, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, a typical picture of private school rugby. It was a system that, as the figures show, a large number of future England internationals continued to come through as the game neared professionalism. As the comments of Rory Underwood in the previous chapter show, some believed that it led to a bias in the selection of school representative sides. Martin Johnson mentions an alleged instance of this in his autobiography, when discussing his season with the England Under-18 team:

The most memorable thing that happened was the dropping of [future international] Neil Back. Backy was by far and away the best player in our team, but he was left out for some public school kid rumoured to have a connection to the coaching setup. We played the Scots lads midweek and then the Welsh in Ebbw Vale. Then we had a few days off before we met up again for the games against Ireland and France. No Backy – dropped not just from the team, but from the whole squad. It was scandalous, really, and a lot of the other boys were in tears at the injustice of it all. It was my first taste of the garbage that surrounded English rugby for far too many years.<sup>25</sup>

While it is difficult to verify this story, what can be said with certainty is that in the 1980s and early 1990s, the power base of school rugby was still very much the private and grammar schools. The sport retained its historical link with such institutions, and though more schools of different types were playing rugby union, they were far from proportionally represented at the highest levels. In this sense, rugby still reflected society at large to a certain extent. As Jeremy Paxman observed of Margaret Thatcher's 1990 cabinet,

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<sup>24</sup> John Mallett, interview, 29 April 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *Autobiography*, 24.

‘of the twenty-two schools attended by cabinet ministers, eighteen belonged to the 1990 Headmaster’s Conference [an association of leading private schools].’<sup>26</sup> The cabinet in 1997, at the end of John Major’s time in power, told a similar story – eighteen of twenty-three were privately educated. In the same year, thirty-three of Britain’s thirty-nine most senior judges were privately educated, as were seven of the nine most senior generals – while at the end of 1995, nine of eighteen permanent secretaries had attended private schools.<sup>27</sup> Rugby, therefore, was far from the only area of society in which such schools continued to exert a significant influence.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, higher education was another area with which rugby had significant ties. During the 1960s and 1970s, student numbers had increased substantially as higher education experienced a notable boom. Under Margaret Thatcher, though, the position of higher education in Britain changed significantly – and amid much conflict. Thatcher, wrote Martin Trow, was eager to ‘bring the harsh disciplines of competitive markets to [universities]’. Her ideological approach was ‘sharply at odds with the values and attitudes of most of the academics in the universities’; indeed, it was her opinion, according to a typically bold statement made to Ralf Dahrendorf, then the Warden of St Anthony’s College, Oxford, that ‘the universities [had] failed Britain.’<sup>28</sup> Against this backdrop, heavy cuts were made to higher education soon after Thatcher had taken power. To begin with, the funding of international students was removed; this was followed by a series of budget cuts to the University Grants Committee, announced in 1980 and 1981 and amounting to a 17 per cent cut to higher education in general. The damage was distributed across the university sector on an institution-by-institution basis,

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<sup>26</sup> Paxman, *Friends in High Places*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Trow, ‘American Perspectives on British Higher Education under Thatcher and Major’, *Oxford Review of Education* 24, no. 1 (March 1998): 111; Paxman, *Friends in High Places*, 184.

and varied from a 6 per cent reduction in funding for the University of York to a 44 per cent cut to Salford University.<sup>29</sup> As a result of this shock to the system, the number of students in universities declined in the early 1980s, after a period of almost exclusive expansion since the end of the Second World War. By the middle of the decade, though, as the economy recovered, the number had begun to rise again. The total number of students across the whole post-secondary system (including not only universities but polytechnics and colleges too) had risen continuously throughout the decade, and indeed had done so since 1963.<sup>30</sup> As the move towards mass higher education continued, the binary system of separation between universities and polytechnics (established in the 1960s) was replaced by a unitary one in 1992, when polytechnics were given the status of universities.

The 1980s and early 1990s were, therefore, a turbulent time for higher education, involving both cuts and expansion. Where did university rugby, a historically important force within the sport, sit among all this? In terms of universities playing rugby, the number of university rugby clubs affiliated to the RFU had been steadily rising since the end of the war. It had done so particularly sharply among the higher education boom of the 1960s. Excluding Oxbridge-related clubs (the number of which stayed virtually constant between 1950 and 1990, rising slightly from forty-three to forty-seven), the number rose from twenty-six in 1950, to thirty-one in 1960 and then to forty-seven in 1970. By the end of the 1980s, though, the increase had slowed to a halt – and, furthermore, the number actually declined slightly across that decade, dipping to forty-one by 1990.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Shattock, *Making Policy in British Higher Education 1945-2011* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2012), 125–26.

<sup>30</sup> Simon, *Education*, 598; Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 233–34.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 219.

The importance of university rugby had not traditionally correlated exactly with numerical strength, though. Instead, as demonstrated in previous chapters, it was based on the relative importance of sport at elite institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, and the relative level of professionalism with which university teams treated the sport in comparison with club teams. In the 1980s, however, the apparent stasis, and even decline, in the number of universities playing rugby did correspond with a gradual decline in the importance of university rugby within the sport at large. This period, in fact, was the beginning of the end for university rugby as a force to be reckoned with at the top level.

The decline in the strength of university rugby may have been linked with the wider state of higher education. Cuts in university funding and the increased emphasis placed on academic prowess and research quality (of which the first government assessment programme, the Research Assessment Exercise, took place in 1985-86) were unlikely to have had a positive impact on the relative importance of university sport.<sup>32</sup> In terms of rugby specifically, however, it was no coincidence that the gradual decline at university level took place alongside the gradual increase in professionalism in the game as a whole. In the more immediate post-war era, top rugby universities like Oxford, Cambridge and Loughborough had arguably devoted more time and thought to preparation and performance than club teams had. Though club, and international, rugby had been slow to catch up on this front, by the late 1970s, as has been shown, the sport as a whole had begun to adopt a more professional outlook. Thus, the increasing importance attached to winning rugby matches at club or county level began to intersect with the declining importance of doing so at university level – and as the game moved closer to the adoption of full-scale professionalism, the two continued on their respective trajectories.

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<sup>32</sup> Shattock, *British Higher Education*, 6.

On the whole, then, university rugby in this era could no longer match the prowess of top-level club rugby. Jonathan Webb, who attended the University of Bristol in the mid-1980s, remembered that it had ‘a very good, well-run club. It had good fixtures, it had regular training twice a week’ and was better organised than some other universities, who ‘were a bit more haphazard – you know, run by the captain and if he was idle, nothing happened.’ In Webb’s first year, Bristol reached the final of the Universities Athletic Union competition – a good indicator that they were one of the best university teams in the country. When it came to playing against club teams, however, they struggled to compete. Webb recalled that they would only play against Bristol rugby club’s second team, and even then would get ‘fairly comprehensively thumped most of the time ... we would lose by forty points.’ Instead of the top teams, they would play against so-called ‘junior’ rugby clubs from the local area, such as ‘Lydney, Stroud, Gordano, Weston-super-Mare, Bridgwater.’<sup>33</sup>

Oxford and Cambridge, it should be said, did remain relatively strong for much of this era, helped by a conscious policy to recruit top-level rugby union players on graduate scholarships. David Kirk, who had captained New Zealand to the World Cup months earlier, appeared for Oxford in the 1987 Varsity match after accepting a Rhodes scholarship to study politics, philosophy and economics (he had previously read medicine). Oxford’s team that day also included Bill Campbell, a second-row forward who had been capped several times for Australia and who had come to the university on a Kobe Steel scholarship.<sup>34</sup> Another graduate scholar in the Oxford forward pack was Victor Ubogu, who would go on to play for England twenty-four times between 1992 and 1999. He had

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<sup>33</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>34</sup> *The Times*, 22 September 1987.

played for both England Under-18s and England Students, as well as Moseley, and had completed a degree in chemical engineering at Birmingham University. He was approached by Oxford to study there for a one-year diploma; an offer that he said was very much related to his rugby prowess. He commented that Oxford did this with a few players ‘that they thought were good enough [academically] to get in’; they would then ‘help facilitate entry to university’. Ubogu therefore attended St Anne’s College for a year, to study politics and economics and, as he put it, to ‘get a Blue’.<sup>35</sup>

In general, however, sporting qualifications did not count for as much as they had done in the past when it came to university entry, especially at undergraduate level. Despite the examples above, for instance, Oxford’s entry requirements were higher than they had ever been – by 1989, 55 per cent of undergraduates admitted had achieved three As at A-level, and 90 per cent had AAC/ABB or better (compared to figures twenty years earlier of 20 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). Gone were the days, Adonis and Pollard point out, when coming from a public school and being ‘keen on rugger’ could secure passage to the university.<sup>36</sup> As John Mallett found out, having played for England Schools (as well as attending the prestigious Millfield School) did not necessarily guarantee a place at university – even one that was well known for its rugby connections:

I wanted to go to university, or it would’ve been college then, in Cardiff – South Glamorgan Institute, which was a famous rugby name, there were a few Welsh internationals up there and things like that – to do sports science, or movement studies. I didn’t get the A-levels to get in. I remember going up there, and I drove up and tried to persuade them to let me in, and I couldn’t. I think I must be one of

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<sup>35</sup> Ubogu, interview.

<sup>36</sup> Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 58.

the first rugby players not to have been able to get in there, which doesn't reflect very well on me!<sup>37</sup>

Despite the decline in university rugby, there were still instances in the 1980s of players being capped for England while still at university. Notable players to achieve this included Rob Andrew, a Cambridge student, and Will Carling, who was studying psychology at Durham University when he was first capped as a twenty-one-year-old. Despite these and other instances, though, it was becoming less and less common to see the names of universities on England team sheets. Indeed, as the game moved into the 1990s and closer to professionalism, it ceased to happen at all – the last time a student was capped for England in the amateur era was in 1988, when Chris Oti played against Scotland and Ireland while still at Cambridge. Even the Varsity Match – once viewed as an alternative England trial – began to lose its relevance to top-level rugby; in 1993, the *Independent's* pre-match headline labelled it 'a ritual losing its meaning', with the article underneath lamenting that 'this afternoon we shall be looking at an increasingly meaningless annual show.'<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, then, the post-war pattern of almost constant change in the British educational landscape continued into the 1980s and 1990s. In secondary education, the comprehensive sector continued to grow, reaching the point where virtually all secondary school pupils in maintained schools were educated in a comprehensive school. At the same time, grammar schools all but disappeared, the eleven-plus system clinging on in only a few areas. Higher education, meanwhile, was transformed by government budget cuts and the abolition of the binary system that

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<sup>37</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>38</sup> *Independent*, 7 December 1993.



has existed since the Robbins era. Among this familiar pattern of turbulence, rugby union's educational make-up changed to a certain extent, too – the sport could not remain wholly insulated from the changes happening around it. Thus, as the number of non-selective state schools grew, so too did the number of such schools playing rugby. The effects of the continuing changes in the school system were reflected, to a certain extent, in the educational background of the England team, with the proportion of players from non-selective state school backgrounds increasing, and that of players from grammar school backgrounds markedly decreasing. Furthermore, the dethroning of the university sector seemed to go hand in hand with a decline in the status of university rugby within the sport as a whole – both found themselves somewhat cut adrift among increasingly professional, money-oriented worlds.

To assume that rugby union simply followed the changes going on around it, however, would be to ignore the distinct pattern of its history with regards to education. The firm, historical bonds to schooling – to a certain type of schooling – that rugby had developed over the course of a century were not simply swept away by the latest shifts in the system. For one, the independent sector of secondary education kept its place in the system – and was even reinforced – under the Conservative governments of the 1980s. Thus, it continued to act as a supply line of top-level rugby players – nearly half of the England players making their debuts between 1980 and 1995 had been to a private school, while only around one-fifteenth of the population of England did so in the same period. Tim Rodber, an England international of the 1990s, was thus moved to describe English rugby union when he first began to play, in the mid-to-late 1980s, as ‘a parochial public school sport’.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tim Rodber, interview, 21 March 2016.

There may, in 1990, have been 1,704 state schools affiliated to the RFU and only 490 private schools – but of the seventeen players who played for England in the Five Nations championship that year, only five had attended state schools. In 1995, with the game on the very cusp of turning professional, more than half of England’s squad for the World Cup in South Africa had been privately educated.<sup>40</sup> While the sport undoubtedly changed in other areas during this period, as will be analysed in subsequent sections of this chapter, in many ways its educational background was as familiar as ever.

## **Class**

You had teachers, lawyers, surveyors – you know, that sort of person.

*Peter Winterbottom, interview.*

On 28 January 1989, the *Independent* ran two articles on class in Britain. They appeared side by side, on the same page. The first was written by Eric Anderson, who had spent his career teaching in private schools, and since 1980 had been headmaster of Eton. ‘The class system has never recovered from Rab Butler’s Education Act of 1944,’ he wrote as his opening line, ‘and its condition is now terminal.’ To the right of Anderson’s article was that of Emma Tennant, a novelist. It was entitled: ‘There is still no room at the top’. In it, Tennant stated that ‘despite appearances to the contrary, social class still holds this

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<sup>40</sup> Appendix Two.

country in its grip ... patriotism, piety and deference all exert their pressure in this unbreakable hold.<sup>41</sup>

Which of the two was correct? Certainly John Major appeared to broadly agree with Anderson when, opening his party leadership campaign on 23 November 1990 (he would be confirmed as prime minister five days later), he stated his belief that a ‘genuinely classless society’ was in reach in Britain within ten years.<sup>42</sup> This followed on from his prime-ministerial predecessor’s deliberate avoidance of the language of class; the latter was a theme which, as Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite have put it, Thatcher minimised ‘in favour of a more positive vision of a new popular constituency that bridged the faultlines of class.’<sup>43</sup> There were signs that the idea of the fading of class from society was felt by the public at large, too: when the subjects of a 1991 Mori poll were asked whether they ever thought of themselves as belonging to a particular social class, two-thirds answered ‘no’.<sup>44</sup>

Such is the nature of evaluating class, however, that by other measures the picture was somewhat different. In the very same poll, a significant majority – a margin of more than five-to-one – of those questioned stated that ‘there will never be a classless society in Britain.’<sup>45</sup> A few years earlier, in 1984, over 90 per cent of the respondents to a sociological survey on class felt they could place themselves in a specific class category – only 3 per cent refused to do so, and only 6 per cent said they ‘didn’t know’ (of the rest, 58 per cent believed they were working class and 42 per cent thought they were middle class). Nearly

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<sup>41</sup> *Independent*, 28 January 1989.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1990.

<sup>43</sup> Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics’, in *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 134.

<sup>44</sup> Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

three-quarters of the respondents felt that class was ‘an inevitable feature of modern society’.<sup>46</sup> Commenting on this survey, Arthur Marwick wrote of ‘a very clear sense that classes still exist’.<sup>47</sup> Writing in the mid-1990s, Adonis and Pollard commented that ‘for all the change and social mobility of recent decades, including the rise of a unified consumer and popular culture, the separation of classes remains one of the key facts about modern Britain’.<sup>48</sup> They also observed the following:

Cultural distinctions and nuances remain legion. Accents, houses, cars, schools, sports, food, fashion, drink, smoking, supermarkets, soap operas, holiday destinations, even training shoes: everything in life is graded with subtle or unsubtle class tags attached. ‘Snobbery is the religion of England,’ wrote the historian Frank Harris in 1925. There has been no mass apostasy since.<sup>49</sup>

It is informative that Adonis and Pollard mention ‘sports’ among their list of aspects of mid-1990s life to which ‘class tags’ were attached. Though they do not say so in the above passage, their mention elsewhere in *A Class Act* of rugby union as a ‘relatively exclusive [sport] in England’ suggests that it was one of the sports they had in mind.<sup>50</sup> It also suggests that, even in the mid-1990s – the advent of professionalism in rugby – the sport was still thought of in class terms.

Nine days after Major’s ‘classless society’ speech (and four days after he had become prime minister), the *Sunday Telegraph* published a feature on his old school, Rutlish School, a comprehensive in south London. As part of the article, a group of current sixth formers discussed their thoughts on class, and the conversation turned to public schoolboys. ‘You

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<sup>46</sup> Marshall et al., *Social Class*, 143–44.

<sup>47</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 328.

<sup>48</sup> Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 33.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

feel different from them,’ said one pupil. ‘It’s not equal. They start off on a different level.’ ‘It’s not necessarily intelligence, it’s more attitude,’ said the next. ‘I still see them on an equal basis’, he said, before adding: ‘perhaps that’s because I play rugby.’ It is telling that the rugby-playing boy felt the sport put him on an equal social footing with someone of a supposed higher class. It is also telling that, as the article went on to say, he was from a middle-class family himself – it was perhaps little surprise, therefore, that rugby union was his chosen sport.<sup>51</sup>

Was it the case, then, that rugby union was still a ‘relatively exclusive’ sport in the 1980s and 1990s? It is useful to begin by looking at both the secondary schools and jobs of the England team in this period. It was shown in the previous section of this chapter that between 1980 and the end of amateurism in 1995, 35 per cent of England debutants had been educated at non-selective state schools, 21 per cent had attended grammar schools and 46 per cent had been privately educated. As discussed above, this does indicate a partial democratisation of the sport, but this is tempered by the context of a changing secondary school system and comparison with educational figures for the population as a whole. If measured simply by the educational background of the national team, therefore, rugby union in England was still a middle-class sport. So it was, too, when measured by the occupations of the England team. In the previous chapter it was noted that only 7 per cent of players between 1971 and 1995 whose jobs are recorded had manual occupations (three builders, two electricians, three farmers and one toolmaker).<sup>52</sup> Even considering the steady decline in manual work across the post-war era – manual workers made up just 38 per cent

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<sup>51</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 December 1990.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

of the British workforce by 1991 – these figures mark rugby out, in occupational terms, as a middle-class sport.<sup>53</sup>

As English rugby union moved closer to professionalism, then, ‘objective’ measures of class appeared to suggest that little was changing in terms of its social composition. The ‘subjective’ evidence from within the sport also provides little departure from that of earlier periods in the post-war era. The picture once more is of a sport that was largely played and run by middle-class men, and retained the traditions that came with such a culture. In terms of players’ jobs in this era, for example, again the common theme in the testimony of players is of variety – the idea that amateur rugby union players did ‘all sorts of jobs’ and that, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit in this, they came from, as Gary Pearce put it of his Northampton teammates, ‘all walks of life’. As with previous eras, when analysed and placed alongside the above statistical evidence, it is clear that a ‘variety of jobs’ usually meant a variety of middle-class jobs.<sup>54</sup>

Rory Underwood, for example, listed the jobs that his Leicester teammates did in the 1980s (Underwood himself was an RAF officer):

Nick Youngs was a farmer; Les Cusworth was sort of insurance; Dodgey was in his dad’s bookbinding business; Woody was a salesman for Rank Xerox I think; Barry, I think he started out at Rank or BT, something like that; Dusty was a sheep farmer up in Collingham. Deano was a copper, Wellsy was a copper; Malcolm Foulkes-Arnold was an architect ... whereas Darren Garforth calls himself a ‘tubular technician’ ... he was a scaffolder.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>54</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Underwood, interview.

This is a similar picture to those painted by other interviewees, and by the data for the jobs of England players in the post-war era – perhaps the only typical component missing is the presence of a teacher. There is one example of an unambiguously working-class job – a scaffolder – but the rest all occupy a place on the spectrum of middle-class occupations. Gary Pearce’s description of the occupations of his England teammates in the late 1980s and early 1990s provides a distinctly similar sketch:

Wade Dooley, policeman at the time; Dean Richards, policeman. Paul Ackford, policeman. Hookers: Peter Wheeler ... insurance salesman. Teaguey was building. Just a whole remit of careers ... Will Carling was ... from the army side of things. There was people from the City; Simon Halliday. And you had Rory Underwood in the RAF. An assortment, a wide variety of careers.<sup>56</sup>

John Mallett, too, commented on the ‘incredible mix’ of careers among the Bath team he played for in the early 1990s, listing teachers, doctors, farmers and lawyers.<sup>57</sup>

The implication in such statements is often (though not always) that the sport was played by people of all social classes. This, as mentioned, forms part of rugby union’s self-image; the idea that, in the previously quoted words of Bill Beaumont, ‘it’s a game with no class distinction whatsoever’.<sup>58</sup> As had been the case in previous years, however, rugby players’ jobs continued to conclusively place it as a middle-class sport, with working-class occupations providing only anecdotal counter-balances to the sheer weight of non-manual, middle-class jobs. Peter Winterbottom, an England international and a Yorkshire farmer who in the late 1980s moved to London to become a City trader, said the following of the types of people playing rugby union in this period:

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<sup>56</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>58</sup> Kitson, ‘Chasing the Chariot’.

Rugby in those days was pretty much a sort of middle-class game, so you had teachers, surveyors, lawyers – you know, that sort of person. There weren't many sort of labourers, or [people] doing unskilled jobs, because most people who played in those days had been to grammar school or boarding school or private school ... A lot had been to university, and they'd ended up with pretty good jobs.<sup>59</sup>

This seems, from the available evidence, to be an accurate summary.

If English rugby remained a middle-class sport in terms of the jobs its players were doing, it also remained so in the context of the culture surrounding it – especially that which continued to envelop England matchdays. While, as noted in the previous chapter, Mike Burton could not help but notice the well-spoken accents that filled Twickenham when England were playing in the 1970s, sportswriter Patrick Collins observed that the social composition of the England-supporting crowd had not changed much by the beginning of the 1990s. He wrote the following:

In the Thirties, George Orwell – or possibly Philip Toynbee, accounts differ – could assert: 'A bomb under the West Stand at Twickenham on international day would end fascism in England for a generation.' As little as 20 years ago, it was possible to paint a picture of Twickenham Man ... He wore the uniform of his tribe: waxed jacket by Burberry, tweed hat by Dunn's, shirt by Viyella, complexion by John Courage ... For intellectual exertion, he turned to the *Daily Telegraph* crossword. His own rugby career was a distant memory of tussles with Home Counties adversaries: Esher Thirds, Sidcup Seconds, Old Gravesendians Extra A.<sup>60</sup>

For the players being watched from the stands by 'Twickenham Man', the formal traditions of an England matchday – signifiers of the sport's middle-class culture – continued to be

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<sup>59</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Collins, *Among the Fans* (London: Wisden Sports Writing, 2011), 117.



observed. Gary Pearce described the England team's post-match social engagements following internationals at Twickenham:

Every home international ... after the game it was; meet the family, around Twickenham, then travel by bus to the Hilton, there was always a dinner at the Hilton where you had the official speeches ... When I first went, you used to have cigars on the table. Big cigars in boxes with the date of the game with the England rose on the top.<sup>61</sup>

It was largely as it 'had been forever', as Budge Rogers commented, with formal dress codes and players arranged on tables with a member of the opposition and an assortment of committee men (though this arrangement, explored later in this section, would change in the early 1990s).<sup>62</sup>

Such social engagements had long been a part of the way the RFU operated; they reflected the formality, tradition and hierarchy of the institution. As discussed earlier, the body in charge of English rugby union had retained these characteristics after the war and beyond, and this was reflected in a relationship with the players that was often viewed by the latter as 'us and them' (in the manner of David Cannadine's 'dichotomous' model of class).<sup>63</sup> That relationship continued to be viewed in much the same way in the 1980s and 1990s. Gary Pearce, for example, recalled the relationship between players and selectors in the earlier part of his England career as 'a "them and us" situation', describing the selectors as 'aloof' (the same word used by Ted Woodward about the England selectors of the 1950s).<sup>64</sup> Victor Ubogu recalled a feeling among the players that RFU committee men were, in the previously quoted

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<sup>61</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 19–20.

<sup>64</sup> Pearce, interview.

words of John Pullin, ‘on the gravy train’; as Ubogu neatly put it, ‘whilst in those days the players, as you go in the plane, you’d turn right – they were turning left.’<sup>65</sup>

Jonathan Webb, meanwhile, gave the following description of the RFU from the point of view of a player:

I suppose your contact points were the presidents, who you’d have an idea who they were because they would accompany you to games and give you your cap or make the dinner speech; Don Rutherford, who was the technical director ... who would accompany us to games; and then obviously the coaching team. And then really, I wasn’t really aware of what this vast hinterland of blazers did ... There’d be various blokes who’d come and chat to you after the game with blazers on, who you’d either get to know or not, and some of whom I liked, some of whom I didn’t particularly care for or didn’t warm to. But genuinely not really got a clue what they did.<sup>66</sup>

The ‘blazer’, or the ‘alickadoo’, was still a recognisable figure within English rugby even as the game moved towards the modern, professional era. It could be argued the existence of such figures – of whom the archetype at this time was the outspoken and staunchly amateur secretary of the RFU, Dudley Wood – represented more than anything else the presence of a conservative, middle-class tradition within the sport.

A particularly detailed insight into the life of a committee man is given by J.V. Smith’s book *‘Good Morning, President’*. Smith – a former Cambridge Blue, England international and Liberal parliamentary candidate – was President of the RFU for the 1982–83 season. He relates that during his year in office, he travelled 98,000 miles ‘on rugby business alone’, and the book is a whirlwind of expenses-paid trips to places like South Africa and the USA, as well as meetings at the East India and Sports Club in London,

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<sup>65</sup> Pullin, interview; Ubogu, interview.

<sup>66</sup> Webb, interview.

attendance at rugby club dinners up and down the country and, of course, a seat at numerous matches across the year.<sup>67</sup> It is a full illustration of Dudley Kemp's statement, of his own time as president in the 1969-70 season, that the position was 'hard work – if very pleasant hard work.'<sup>68</sup> The world it describes is thoroughly middle class – one of lunches, dinners, speeches, toasts, committee meetings, chairmen, company directors, flights, gentlemen's clubs, rugby clubs and a daily phone call from Air Commodore Bob Weighill CBE, the Secretary of the RFU, beginning with the words 'Good morning, President'. Even such a short, seemingly routine passage as the following highlights many of these themes:

That evening I went with Peter Yarranton to the Lensbury Club's dinner. Peter is, of course, President of two clubs, Lensbury and the Wasps. The first is where he works, being the Sports and Social Club of Shell, his employers, on the outskirts of Twickenham and the Rugby club of that club.<sup>69</sup>

Smith's book, overall, shows the RFU as a hierarchical body with a firm commitment to the amateur ethos of the sport and a strong attachment to tradition.

Given its continued amateur status, rugby union relied on unpaid administrators like Smith to keep it running. As he wrote of the England selectors, they were 'doing a service to the game which someone has to do and for which they are not paid.'<sup>70</sup> Such roles often required a significant amount of the occupants' time, and the fact they were unpaid meant that those who took them could usually afford to do so without worrying too much about loss of earnings or job security. J.V. Smith's description of the attendees at a 1982 meeting

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<sup>67</sup> J.V. Smith, *'Good Morning, President': Rugby From The Top* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), xv.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 10 July 1970, London.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *'Good Morning, President'*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

with Horst Dassler, the Chairman of Adidas, about a growing scandal over players being paid to wear his company's boots, provide a typical snapshot:

On our side we had John Burgess, who is the Managing Director of Simon-Carves, an engineering company of international repute; Peter Yarranton, a Shell Executive who is our honorary public relations adviser; Bob Weighill [RFU secretary and a retired RAF Air Commodore]; and myself [J.V. Smith, director of a family agricultural business].<sup>71</sup>

The roles of both president and selector, in particular, continued to be archetypes of the amateur ethos. They were occupied by individuals who were seen as 'good people' (to use Micky Steele-Bodger's previously quoted phrase) and who, crucially, had performed the requisite service to the sport and were therefore felt to be deserving of the deference of those below. There were, however, some challenges to authority in this era that suggested that such deference was beginning to be questioned in a more outward way than it had been in the past. Some of these challenges were milder than others. In the previous chapter, it was noted that the England team asked Budge Rogers, chairman of selectors in the early 1980s, whether they could start sitting together at post-match dinners, rather than be separated across tables of committee men. Rogers declined their request at the time but the traditional format had changed by the early 1990s – as Jonathan Webb remembered, 'by the end [of my England career] you'd sit on a table of just players. Which was a massive relief.'<sup>72</sup> It was a small step forward for 'player power' – but a step forward nonetheless.

The sport's acceleration towards professionalism in the early 1990s provided the catalyst for further challenges to the RFU hierarchy and to the idea of deference from players to administrators. As will be explored in greater detail in the next section of this

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>72</sup> Webb, interview.

chapter, England's players were becoming increasingly aware of the amount of money in the sport, and increasingly frustrated by the amateur regulations that prevented them from receiving any of it. Players such as Brian Moore and Rob Andrew began to take a lead in campaigning for the rights of players to receive what they felt was a fair share of the money being generated by English rugby, causing increasing tension between players and the more staunchly amateur administrators. The most high-profile case of such tension came just before the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Will Carling, England's captain and often the subject of media interest, had appeared on a Channel 4 television programme discussing the state of the sport. After being interviewed, he had made what he thought to be an off-air remark in which he referred to the RFU committee as 'fifty-seven old farts'. The remark made its way into the press, and the RFU reacted somewhat heavy-handedly by sacking Carling as captain (before reinstating him three days later).<sup>73</sup> A comment piece in the *Independent*, critical both of Carling and the RFU, summed up the sacking as follows:

To sacrifice, in a fit of pique, a captain who has led England through one of the most glorious periods in their history signifies that [the RFU] are more concerned with their own importance than they are with the morale of a team about to challenge for the World Cup.<sup>74</sup>

It was an episode in which the RFU's tendencies as a conservative, traditionalist and hierarchical body came to the fore. Carling, in effect, had defied the proper order of things by besmirching his superiors, and – in the initial decision at least – this appeared to take precedence over any concerns about the success of the team. A previously quoted comment by Nigel Horton about his own experiences of the RFU – 'It was this class [attitude], and this "we are superior" attitude, and "you are just the player"' – seems

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<sup>73</sup> *Independent*, 6 May 1995; *Guardian*, 9 May 1995.

<sup>74</sup> *Independent*, 6 May 1995.

particularly relevant here.<sup>75</sup> While it was hardly the case that Will Carling, educated at Sedbergh and Durham and with a background as an officer in the Army, was of a particularly lower class in broader societal terms to those in charge, he was certainly, as a player, their inferior within the class structure of English rugby.

While episodes like this served to highlight the continued influence of order and hierarchy in the sport, they also demonstrated the fact that such ideas were beginning to be questioned for the first time. Was there a hint of movement in the previously solid social foundations of the sport? In one particular sense English rugby union did become more meritocratic in this period; in the 1987-88 season, an official league structure was introduced to club rugby for the first time. Although clubs still initially organised the dates of their own fixtures, they had now been organised into leagues, and who they played against was dictated by which league they were in – rather than by, as described in previous chapters, a mixture of geography, playing strength and social status. There was also another major change in the playing calendar which may have had a democratising effect on the sport: the introduction, in 1987, of a World Cup competition. The first was held in New Zealand and Australia, while the second, in 1991, took place partly in England. The effects of this new tournament, and of the introduction of leagues, on the sport as a whole is explored in more detail in the next section of this chapter, but one effect that some believe the 1991 World Cup had was to broaden the reach of the sport in England. This was thanks, mainly, to the fact that England reached the final (which they lost to Australia). Jonathan Webb, who played for England at the 1991 World Cup, said the following:

[Rugby union's popularity] definitely step-changed in '91 ... My impression was before that it was a slightly middle-class game, nice but fairly select audience – the

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<sup>75</sup> Horton, interview.

Twickenham faithful. And then in '91 it became a national game ... A load more people started stopping you in the street or recognising you. People who hadn't previously been interested in rugby would know about it and know we were doing well. So I think '91 made a massive difference to that.<sup>76</sup>

Peter Winterbottom also made this point, saying 'I think it drew a lot of people, in England especially, to the game, because it was such a middle-class game, and it was sort of suddenly changing and people who would normally not have associated themselves with rugby did.'<sup>77</sup> His England teammate Simon Halliday, who was working in the City at the time, remembered that on his return to work after the tournament, 'Football-mad market-makers found their sons wanting to take up mini-rugby.'<sup>78</sup>

The tournament undoubtedly did attract wider interest in England than the sport had previously been used to. For example, the UK-wide television audience for the final, 13.6 million, was the highest ever for a rugby union match. Measuring the lasting effect the World Cup had on the popularity of the sport outside its traditional base, though, is more difficult. To put the television numbers into perspective, at least, almost double the amount of people watched England's football World Cup semi-final against Germany in 1990, and nearly 24 million tuned in to watch Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean win a figure skating bronze medal at the 1994 Winter Olympics.<sup>79</sup> Rugby union's cross-class popularity had been given a shot in the arm, but the World Cup did not suddenly lead to a significant change in the types of people who supported the game. Even in 2003, eight years after rugby union turned professional, television viewers for England's World Cup games were

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<sup>76</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>77</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Simon Halliday, *City Centre: High Ball to High Finance* (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2013), 124.

<sup>79</sup> *Independent*, 20 November 2003; 'Record Audience for England Match', *BBC News*, 25 June 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/3839067.stm>.

made up, according to the broadcaster, ITV, of 'basically affluent males ... up to three times the normal ratio in that market', with 'a high proportion of ABC1s'.<sup>80</sup> Gerald Davies, the former Welsh international, was correct to exercise caution when he wrote around a month after the 1991 tournament that 'such a large domestic television audience as witnessed the World Cup should not create an illusion of extraordinary popularity'.<sup>81</sup>

The 1990s were a decade in which classlessness, as indicated at the beginning of this section, was a favourite subject and stated goal of those in charge of the country. As Alwyn Turner points out, both John Major and Tony Blair 'failed' in this goal, 'with wealth inequality increasing and social mobility decreasing'. Turner, though, argues that a 'kind of classless culture ... emerged instead.' This democratisation of culture was initiated not by politicians, but 'was the product of cultural initiatives, from Cool Britannia and the new lads to television soaps and the internet'.<sup>82</sup> The mood of the nation, as expressed through such forms of culture, was, as Tony Blair put it, 'less deferential' and 'less class-bound'.<sup>83</sup> Rugby union was, to a certain extent, caught up in this trend towards cultural classlessness. The World Cups of 1991 and 1995 did take the game to a larger audience than usual, and the names of England players became well known – the likes of Will Carling and Rory Underwood achieved celebrity status (particularly the former, thanks to tabloid interest in his private life and his association with Princess Diana, as well as his media-ready character). In one of the more bizarre cultural cross-overs of the decade, for example, Carling was featured in 1993 on the hidden-camera 'Gotcha' segment of the popular

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<sup>80</sup> *Independent*, 20 November 2003. ABC1 refers to the top three classifications (A, B and C1) in the 'Social Grade' system. Social Grade is the standard, occupation-based social classification system used in marketing, advertising and market research. 'Social Grade', *National Readership Survey*, accessed 24 September 2017, <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>.

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 13 December 1991.

<sup>82</sup> Turner, *A Classless Society*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted *Ibid*.



Saturday night entertainment programme *Noel's House Party*. England teammates Steve Bates, Jeff Probyn, John Olver, Ian Hunter and Martin Bayfield laughed along at their captain in the studio as footage of him struggling to teach an uncooperative Mr Blobby (the show's mascot) how to play rugby was aired to millions.<sup>84</sup> Rugby was, undoubtedly, in new territory.

On the eve of professionalism, with the sport receiving greater media exposure than it had ever had before and with players coming from a more diverse educational background, English rugby union in 1995 was at least a little closer to classlessness than it had been in the past. A little closer, maybe, but still so far away. For all the evidence of greater numbers of comprehensively schooled England internationals, growing television audiences and hints of a decline in deference within the sport, its social core remained largely intact. Of those six players sat on the sofa on *Noel's House Party*, four had been to private schools, and of the ninety-nine who made their debuts between 1980 and 1995, at least forty-four had also done so, in a country where only around 6 or 7 per cent of the population attended such schools. Soon a rugby union player's job would be just that – rugby union player – but in the lead-up to professionalism, the majority continued to be occupied in middle-class jobs.

In conclusion, in *British Society Since 1945*, Arthur Marwick notes the changes in the social background of Margaret Thatcher's cabinets between her first, in 1979, and that she chose immediately after her 1987 election victory. Those making up the 1979 cabinet were overwhelmingly 'upper class' (defined by Marwick, quoting Sir Ian Fraser initially, as 'that "reservoir of persons economically free and accustomed to responsibility from an early

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<sup>84</sup> 'Will Carling Teaches Mr Blobby How to Play Rugby', *YouTube*, accessed 15 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I06fRQlJGwQ>; Tom Hamilton, "'I Was Bored so I Kicked Him up the Arse'", *ESPN*, 23 January 2014, [http://www.espn.co.uk/rugby/story/\\_/id/15333436](http://www.espn.co.uk/rugby/story/_/id/15333436).

age” who ... turn out to exercise a dominance in the spheres of power, authority, wealth and income totally disproportionate to their numbers, and who have a distinctive culture and lifestyle of their own’).<sup>85</sup> By 1987, however, there had been a hint of change: ‘Out of a cabinet of twenty-one ... eight were in the traditional upper-class mould, while ... seven distinctively were not.’ Marwick describes this as ‘change, certainly, but change within strong traditional limitations.’<sup>86</sup> It is a description that can perfectly be applied to English rugby union and social class in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Work and playing the game**

Inevitably there’s a feeling that look, if I’m playing this much and committing this much it would be nice to be paid.

*Jonathan Webb, interview.*

On 27 August 1995, it was announced that rugby union had become professional. After three days of IRB discussions in Paris, the decision was made that ‘the description of the game as amateur was no longer appropriate’ and that, consequently, the sport should become open – ‘Unions and their constituent bodies may pay monies or material benefit for participation in the game.’<sup>87</sup> With pay deals already announced in the southern hemisphere, and with the large amounts of money now generated by the sport this, in practice, meant the immediate end of amateurism. Though there had been a sense of

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<sup>85</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 210–13; *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>86</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 328.

<sup>87</sup> Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of the International Rugby Football Board, 24–26 August 1995, Paris.

inevitability about such a decision, it was nonetheless momentous. Rugby union had been formally amateur for 109 years, long outlasting other major international sports – but no more. Commenting on the decision, RFU chairman Bill Bishop said: ‘Playing in an England shirt doesn’t seem to be enough these days, I’m afraid ... it’s a sad day’. Jeremy Guscott, one of the stars of the England team, saw it somewhat differently: ‘I think it’s great for the game and brilliant from the players’ point of view,’ he declared.<sup>88</sup>

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that the 1960s and 1970s were a transitional time for the sport in terms of its commitment to amateurism. Though many of the foundations of professionalism were laid, English rugby union remained amateur at its core. No significant challenge was made to the sport’s sacred amateur status, and those playing it were largely happy with the status quo. To quote John Pullin once more, professionalism ‘didn’t even look in the foreseeable future.’<sup>89</sup> The defining feature of rugby union in the 1980s and 1990s, however, was that the future finally arrived. The changes set in motion in earlier decades reached their culmination, as the force of money became too much to bear and the amateur edifice collapsed under the weight. With increased demands on the time of players as a result of a more professional approach to training and playing, the balance between work and play had become more and more difficult for top-level players to manage. The lack of financial reward for players – who were creating what was an increasingly lucrative ‘product’ – became increasingly frustrating for them. In a changing society where the market now held sway and individual gain was celebrated, rugby union’s amateur status became more than a curious anachronism – it became fatally out of touch.

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<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 28 August 1995.

<sup>89</sup> Pullin, interview.

Prior to the game turning professional, though, rugby union players continued to earn their money away from the pitch, just as those before them had done. This section will therefore begin by looking at the types of work players in which players were engaged in this period. Looking first at Britain as a whole, the picture is again of a workforce shifting unfalteringly from manual to non-manual forms of employment. In 1971, 55 per cent of the workforce were in manual jobs; ten years later the figure had dropped to 48 per cent, and by 1991 it stood at just 38 per cent.<sup>90</sup> The steady decline of the manufacturing industries was reflected in these figures – in 1991, just 21 per cent of the workforce were employed in manufacturing (compared with 35 per cent in 1966), as Thatcherite economic policy and globalisation combined to the detriment of manufacturing industries in Britain.<sup>91</sup> In April 1983, for example, Britain became a net importer of manufactured goods for the first time in the industrial era; by 1990, as Graham Stewart points out, ‘the number of Britons employed in wholesale and retail finally overtook the number engaged in manufacturing.’<sup>92</sup> As manufacturing declined, so the service industries continued to grow. It was noted in the previous chapter that in 1971, just over half of all people in employment were in services; by 1991, this had increased to just over two-thirds.<sup>93</sup> While the post-war expansion of education, medical services and leisure services continued to fuel this, financial industries played a particular part in the 1980s, growing by over a million employees between 1981 and 1991 (compared with a growth of just over 600,000 in the previous fifteen years). The financial workforce increased by 236 per cent in the quarter-century between 1966 and 1991.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>92</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 318; Stewart, *Bang!*, 464.

<sup>93</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 284; *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>94</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 284.

The jobs England rugby players did in this time reflected this continued shift from manual to non-manual work; as previously noted, only 7 per cent of those who made their debuts for England between 1971 and 1995 (and for whom employment information has been found) had manual jobs, down from the 10 per cent recorded for 1946-1970.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, this figure contrasts sharply with the 48 per cent of British workers in manual jobs in 1981, or the 38 per cent in 1991. Even in a society in which manual work was steadily decreasing, the England team's occupations were, very clearly, disproportionately non-manual.<sup>96</sup>

England's 1991 World Cup squad serves as a useful case study with which to illuminate this point. Of the twenty-six players involved, only three had what could be definitively categorised as manual or working-class jobs: Jason Leonard was a builder, Nigel Redman was an electrician and Mike Teague was a bricklayer. The remaining twenty-three contained, as had always been the case, a wide variety of non-manual, middle-class jobs. Surveyors, stockbrokers, police officers, an RAF pilot, a surgeon, a teacher, a sales manager, a financial advisor, a corporate financier – the list reads much like it would have done at any point in the post-war period.<sup>97</sup> If any change can be detected it is a move towards more corporate, finance-related jobs. As Gareth Williams put it in 1989, players were often 'no longer the teachers and sales representatives of the 1950s or even the 1960s; they were increasingly the financial advisers, building society managers and business executives of a commercial world in which rugby players were now marketable assets.'<sup>98</sup> In terms of broader categories of work, though, and especially in terms of social class of work,

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<sup>95</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

<sup>96</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 288.

<sup>97</sup> Alex Spink, *The Rugby Union Who's Who 1991/92* (London: CollinsWillow, 1991).

<sup>98</sup> Williams, 'Rugby Union', 333.

as the sport reached the end of the amateur period little had changed with regards to the occupations of top-level English rugby union players.

As noted above, the finance industry grew particularly rapidly in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was a time of change in the industry, central to which was the Big Bang – a package of deregulatory reforms introduced by the government in 1986 which did away with many of the longstanding structures and traditional practices of the City of London and stimulated a period of frantic activity.<sup>99</sup> Though rugby union may have fitted in well with the traditional, ‘old school tie’ City of decades gone by, it also found itself at home in the new world order of finance. The two worlds began to frequently overlap. As well as the involvement of investment house *Save & Prosper* as a multi-million-pound sponsor of English rugby union throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, and the fact that, as Tony Collins has put it, ‘the Varsity match and Five Nations games became a part of the cycle of the new City’s social and corporate entertainment life’, a number of England players in this era had jobs in the City.<sup>100</sup> The combination of the typical socio-economic and educational background of an England player with the marketability of his sports star status proved appealing to financial employers.

Simon Halliday, for example, had four years’ experience as a stockbroker in a small office in Bath when he first went job-hunting in the City. ‘[M]y knowledge of the institutional market was close to zero,’ he wrote in his 2013 autobiography. He said it was, however, ‘amazing what you can do if you nod sagely for a while over a business discussion, interspersed with a healthy dose of rugby chat.’<sup>101</sup> Peter Winterbottom was perhaps the best example of the power of rugby celebrity status in the world of finance. He

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<sup>99</sup> Kynaston, *City of London*, Chapter Thirty-Nine.

<sup>100</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 196.

<sup>101</sup> Halliday, *City Centre*, 115.

had previously worked on his uncle's farm in Yorkshire and played for Headingley before moving to Harlequins in the late 1980s and beginning a new career:

When I came back from South Africa in '88 I didn't have a job up in Leeds, so some friends at Quins said come down there, join Quins and we'll try and get you a job in the City. So I did, I came down – I ended up finding my own job in the City and so I spent five years at Quins, at the sort of tail-end of my career.

Winterbottom was by this stage a well-known England player, and his lack of occupational experience in anything but farming proved no barrier to finding a job as an inter-dealer Eurobond broker in the capital. As he put it, when he first walked into a City dealing room he 'didn't have a clue what was going on', but nonetheless carved out a successful career which lasted long after he retired from rugby in 1993. 'The City, Winterbottom found, was 'just booming ... The business was good, and suddenly you're earning more money than you ever thought you would'. Rugby had, of course, played its part in Winterbottom's career transition, both in creating the opportunity and in helping him to be successful in his job: 'People want to speak to you on the phone and deal with you', he said; 'certainly it did help.'<sup>102</sup>

Rugby also helped others to find work in the post-Big Bang City. The chain continued when, thanks to his newfound connections, Winterbottom helped another England international, David Pears, to move from a career in construction management to a City job (and, in rugby terms, from Sale in the north-west to Harlequins in London).<sup>103</sup> Brian Moore also switched careers alongside a move to Harlequins (from Nottingham), moving from law to banking in 1990 (before eventually becoming a solicitor again). As

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<sup>102</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>103</sup> *The Rugby Paper*, 3 March 2015.

Harlequins secretary Colin Herridge put it, ‘What we did for Brian was find the opportunity for him to get into merchant banking ... We will do everything we possibly can to help a young man in his career and there’s no crime in that.’<sup>104</sup> For all the change underway in both rugby union and the world of finance, it was a statement that could just as easily have been made in the 1950s, when the likes of Malcolm Phillips, as described in Chapter Two, were being ‘tempted’ by offers of ‘City-orientated’ jobs through the same club.<sup>105</sup> Thus, while both rugby union and the world of finance were evolving rapidly to meet the demands of a market-driven society, the right background and connections could still get you into the latter, and the former could still land a player a job he would otherwise not have had the opportunity to be considered for.

It was noted in the previous chapter that, during the 1970s, a shift in middle-class working cultures and practices began, which saw the old ‘gentlemanly’, amateur concept of work threatened. This trend notably gathered pace in the 1980s, with economic shifts and computerisation contributing to a landscape in which work was less secure, more individualistic and more competitive than it had been in the past.<sup>106</sup> In this newly competitive environment, employees were challenged more than ever to prove their place in the meritocracy – a concept, Peter Hennessy argues, that Margaret Thatcher ‘placed firmly at the centre of her battle standard’.<sup>107</sup> A ‘job for life’ was much less likely than it had been at the beginning of the post-war period and an individual’s CV took on newfound importance. Sociologist Ray Pahl argued that, for the middle classes, the CV in this period became the major focus of a career – individuals worked primarily for their own CVs

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<sup>104</sup> *Independent*, 15 December 1993.

<sup>105</sup> Phillips, interview.

<sup>106</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 198–205.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Establishment and Meritocracy* (London: Haus Curiosities, 2014), 39.



rather than for their companies.<sup>108</sup> British workplaces, therefore, continued on their path away from amateurism and towards a concept of professionalism that began to concentrate more and more on individual achievement and talent.

To a certain extent, the power of closed, ‘old boy’ networks began to wane. ‘Passing examinations’, Brian Harrison has written of Britain in this time, ‘was integral to professional advancement’.<sup>109</sup> Qualifications – now more widespread given the expansion of higher education in the preceding decades – and work experience became increasingly important in securing, and staying in, a job. The instances of rugby players in the City mentioned above, though, do not fit with this trend. Being part of the rugby union ‘fraternity’ still granted players a certain amount of ‘credit’ above and beyond their working or educational achievements when it came to employment. This was one way in which the sport resisted societal change in this time, swimming against the tide of modernity – the network described in the previous two chapters was still very much intact in the 1980s and 1990s. There are many examples in this period of players finding employment through connections in the sport, not least those in the City mentioned above. Gareth Chilcott, a Bath and England player in the 1980s and 1990s, has often talked about the way in which rugby could help players to find employment: ‘once you got to a certain level of rugby in the amateur days,’ he said in an interview, ‘people would help you out in jobs and look after you’.<sup>110</sup> Chilcott was one of many at Bath who were helped by the club to find work. Following little formal education and an itinerant initial working life involving a range of jobs from lumberjack to debt collector, as a result of his involvement in rugby he became managing director of a limousine company owned by a benefactor of Bath and now runs

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<sup>108</sup> Pahl’s argument is outlined in Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 215.

<sup>109</sup> Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 142.

<sup>110</sup> *Guardian*, 26 September 2003.

his own sports travel business. 'Rugby ... saved me from being an out of work drifter', he wrote in 1990.<sup>111</sup>

Victor Ubogu was another Bath and England player who was helped by his club after being approached by them to join following his time at university:

As was typical in those days of the rugby clubs, I was given a job by one of the benefactors, Malcolm Pearce, who owned a series of farms, and [a] wholesale newspaper distribution [company] and some local convenience shops. So I came to Bath, joined them, got a job; he just gave me a job in the property department of Johnsons [Johnsons Group, Pearce's business]. I mean he employed a lot of the players.<sup>112</sup>

As well as Chilcott and Ubogu, Pearce also found work for future England internationals like Mike Catt, Ben Clarke and Steve Ojomoh.<sup>113</sup> John Mallett also played for Bath in the 1990s, initially working as a marketing assistant with a leisure management company thanks to his connections with the club:

There was a guy who was friendly with Bath rugby club and he said, 'Yeah, we'll give him a job and we'll look after him.' So I had a proper job with a salary, but ... it was, I'm sure, a friendly senior manager there that helped the rugby guy get a job. And that was pretty much the culture at the time of guys that would work for a specific one or two employers in Bath who were helping guys have ... jobs at those companies.<sup>114</sup>

Mallett said he's 'sure' this also happened at other clubs around the country; that 'the local community were very much involved in the rugby club and they wanted to help people'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Chilcott, *Cooch*, 59–63; *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>112</sup> Ubogu, interview.

<sup>113</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 13 August 1998.

<sup>114</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

As well as the aforementioned examples of Harlequins players in the City, Gary Pearce at Northampton experienced this:

During the '91 World Cup, that was during a recession in the construction industry ... I finished the World Cup to find out that I'd been made redundant from my job. But that was when the likes of rugby, and the networking around it, helped ... People at Northampton and another firm of chartered surveyors in the area who were supportive of Northampton [Rugby Club] found me a position ... the job wouldn't have come had it not been through rugby and playing for Northampton.<sup>116</sup>

Rugby union, therefore, was as helpful as ever in providing players with job opportunities. This in fact appears to have become more commonplace as the sport itself became less amateur. As the importance of winning matches increased thanks to the introduction of the league system, clubs were keen to attract the best possible players. In the absence of being able to offer direct financial inducements to players in a still-amateur sport, clubs instead offered the promise of a secure job which would be, in the words of John Mallett, 'supportive and accommodating of rugby players' and offer the 'flexible working environment' they would need to pursue the sport at the highest level.<sup>117</sup> As Jonathan Webb put it:

It wasn't professional but [a lot of players] had jobs where their commitment wasn't too onerous, shall we say. And so that was the way that clubs could help support a lad ... they couldn't give him any money but they'd say look, we'll sort you out with a ... shared flat with the other lads and here's a job that you can do which would be not too taxing.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>117</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>118</sup> Webb, interview.

In general, rugby players' employers continued to be supportive of their sporting commitments. This was aided by the fact that the profiles of players, and therefore their value to employers as marketing tools, were increasing. Following on from Mallett's comments immediately above, he said that his job with the leisure company 'felt like a full, busy job, but it was always with a view that the commitment to being able to do things was slightly shaped by needing to be off to get to training, or not available because we were going to a match on a Friday afternoon'. Mallett went on to be a teacher, getting his first job at Marlborough College. He said 'they needed to be a sympathetic, supportive employer to take me on – but also I think there were benefits for them in terms of a first-class senior rugby player being involved.'<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Webb, a surgeon, also said his employers were 'pretty supportive – my bosses were very pleased to say that the England full-back was their houseman'.<sup>120</sup> Peter Winterbottom toured New Zealand with the British Lions in 1983, and stated of the players on that tour that 'most [of their] employers were sympathetic and obviously realised that playing at that sort of level ... was good for business, good for the company.'<sup>121</sup>

A particularly illustrative example of a player with a supportive employer in this era was Rory Underwood and the Royal Air Force. It had been an ambition of Underwood's to be a pilot in the RAF since his school days, and after first applying in his final year of school and being told to return a year later, he was accepted second time around in the autumn of 1982. At that point, Underwood's meteoric rugby rise – which saw him first capped by England aged just twenty – was in progress, and he had played during the

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<sup>119</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

summer for England Under-23s. It was clear from the beginning that any rugby commitments he had would not be an issue for his soon-to-be employers:

I got a phone call from the RAF, saying, ‘Right, just to let you know, you’ve been ... successful in your application for the Royal Air Force. We’re obviously conscious about your rugby – when are you able to start?’ I think most of the time [you’d just be told] ‘you’re in, this is your start date’, whereas they said: ‘When would you like to start?’

Underwood recalled that his county team, Yorkshire, were at the time on a good run in the County Championship:

I think we’d qualified into the semi-finals or quarter-finals, and we were going for the County Championship ... The final was the last weekend of January or something like that. So I said ‘look, I’ve got Yorkshire – the final is the last week of January, so what have you got after January finishes?’ He said ‘fourteenth of February’. I said, ‘Yep, ok, go for that.’<sup>122</sup>

The RAF remained very supportive of Underwood’s rugby commitments throughout his career. As he put it, ‘The Air Force are outstanding ... They recognise the “brand value” if you want to use that phrase. And they didn’t put undue pressure on me.’ He described having little trouble getting time off to play rugby:

I just put down [when] I was away ... The boss said, ‘Look, just tell us when you’re away’, because they’d been told by their senior officers, ‘Look, just make Rory’s life easy – it’s great PR, it’s great kudos for the Air Force.’ So, he just said ‘as long as you let us know’, so I’d put down [when I was due to be playing rugby], and they’d send me off in detachments in between.

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<sup>122</sup> Underwood, interview.

While he did occasionally encounter ‘bureaucratic’ problems – such as finding once he had not given the required three weeks’ notice for permission for a member of the armed forces to travel to Ireland – there were usually ‘big officers looking after’ him who would see to it that the situation was dealt with. After all, as he commented, the ‘flying wing’ image (Underwood played as a winger, a position which lent itself particularly well to Air Force-related headlines) was ‘great PR’ for the RAF.<sup>123</sup> His success on the rugby field and the glamour of his job combined to make Underwood increasingly famous, and he became a regular sight in print and on television in his RAF flight suit. The RAF were happy to use his fame to their advantage. Journalist Brendan Gallagher, for example, recalled that he was once part of an RAF press conference ahead of the inter-services rugby tournament. The press were surprised to find that the gathering was going to take place onboard a VC10 aeroplane. Once they reached 33,000 feet, they were treated to a sudden surprise appearance from Rory Underwood, flying alongside in his Hawk jet and speaking to them through his intercom.<sup>124</sup>

While most players did find their employers were supportive of their rugby commitments, this did not mean that balancing work and rugby was necessarily easy, or that having international rugby as ‘a hobby’, as Underwood put it, could not in fact prove detrimental to a player’s career away from the pitch.<sup>125</sup> The previous chapter showed that, as work began to become more professional in the 1960s and 1970s, players did sometimes feel that a lack of career progression was a ‘sacrifice’ made in the name of pursuing top-level rugby, and that it could be difficult or, in the case of long tours, impossible to give up the necessary time.<sup>126</sup> In 1979, Dunning and Sheard wrote that top-level rugby union

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *The Rugby Paper*, 14 May 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Underwood, interview.

<sup>126</sup> Rossborough, interview.

players were becoming “time-professionals” ... i.e. they devote increasing amounts of time and energy to the pursuit of rugby. This means that it has come, for them, to form a major life-interest, pushing other interests such as marriage, family, education and occupation into the background.<sup>127</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, both work and rugby union became more professional and thus this trend became more prominent than ever before – and many players began to struggle to keep everything in balance.

Jonathan Webb indicated, as previously quoted, that his employers were supportive of him playing rugby. He was, for example, able to take the six weeks off work he needed in order to take part in the 1991 World Cup. This was not, however, entirely straightforward:

[I]n '91 I didn't get paid for the six weeks of the tournament. I basically took unpaid leave because I didn't have any holiday left. And [the consultant body at the hospital] said, 'Oh well, but you'll get compensation', and I said, 'Well no, it's an amateur game' ... And they said, 'Well that's outrageous' ... and they organised a whip round to help supplement my salary. Which not every consultant contributed to!

Webb, indeed, often had to take unpaid leave to play rugby, and also struggled at various points in his rugby career to balance work with an increasingly demanding sport. At the end of the 1980s, his job as a junior doctor was becoming increasingly busy. Having failed a surgical exam following the Five Nations tournament in 1989, and having struggled to combine the demands of being a junior doctor, regularly on call, with those of club and international rugby, he even decided to quit the sport aged twenty-six, thinking to himself: 'I've got to stop, I can't keep doing this'. After a few

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<sup>127</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 229.

weeks' break, grateful for even a short period of time where he 'wasn't being hammered all the time', he reconsidered his decision and joined a new club, Bath. Webb played for another three years before retiring from rugby for good in 1993:

By then I was a registrar, which is kind of the next level up in medicine. I recognised that that was becoming increasingly difficult and so I basically made a decision that that would be my last season ... I was living in Bristol, playing for Bath, working in Swindon on the Oxford training programme, with two small kids. And rugby was getting more professional, the time spent before every international was lengthening.

He described the feeling after retiring from rugby as 'kind of a blessed relief'. He was, he said, 'tired of looking at rotas and swapping and juggling'. He was only thirty years old when he stopped playing; 'physically I could've carried on for another few years at least', he said, but 'it was just I couldn't do it all.'<sup>128</sup>

While Webb's job was perhaps more demanding than most, he was not alone in expressing these sentiments, especially in this era. John Mallett described a realisation 'a couple of years' into his aforementioned job at a leisure company that he was 'not going to get very far doing [the job]' while trying to balance it with his rugby commitments. 'Every time my boss wanted me to do a bit more,' he recalled, '[I had to say] "actually, what I really want to do is go off and play rugby this weekend."' So it was perhaps a career-limiting factor.' He also described the years immediately before the game turned professional as a time when it was 'becoming evident that it was going to be harder and harder to maintain both [a job and a rugby career], particularly given the increased expectations on conditioning and improving as rugby players.'<sup>129</sup> Gary Pearce suggested that 'there were so

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<sup>128</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>129</sup> Mallett, interview.



many demands on players, in terms of to be fitter, stronger, to give more time into preparation – you couldn't hold down, in most cases, a career or a job at the same time.' He said he felt 'a triangle of pressure from work, family [and rugby]'.<sup>130</sup>

In a particularly illuminating example put forward in his 2010 autobiography, Brian Moore describes having to ask for permission from England coach Geoff Cooke, on the eve of a match against New Zealand at Twickenham in 1993, to fly to Glasgow in order to collect vital witness statements for a case he was working on in his job as a solicitor. Permission was, begrudgingly, granted: Moore flew to Glasgow and back on the Friday, worked into the night to dictate the statements which were collected by courier and taken to his office, and 'fell into bed exhausted.' 'The next day', he jokes, 'I got up, had breakfast, and casually beat the All Blacks.' The story, he says, 'illustrates the increasing impossibility of players combining their need to have a roof over their heads with the escalating demands made by the RFU in terms of time and effort.'<sup>131</sup>

As noted earlier, this increased tension between work and rugby was down in part to the increased professionalisation of the former, but mainly to the increased professionalisation of the latter. The change in approaches to training and performance in the sport charted across the previous post-war decades continued in the 1980s and 1990s. This happened at the same gradual pace at first, but more rapidly as the benefits of a more considered approach became clearer and the importance of winning increased. The latter trend was largely thanks to the introduction of greater competition in the form of leagues and, on the international stage, the Rugby World Cup – which, as Martin Polley has pointed out, helped to awaken the sport in Britain from a 'relatively isolationist stance' and,

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<sup>130</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>131</sup> Brian Moore, *Beware of the Dog* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 230–31.

like English football had done earlier in the post-war era, begin to adopt ‘a more professional culture’.<sup>132</sup> Peter Winterbottom, who made his debut for England in 1982, recalled that the beginning of the 1980s saw extra training introduced: ‘The Monday before the game we would meet at Stourbridge and we’d train ... I think it had been introduced by Mike Davis, the coach when [England] won the grand slam in 1980.’<sup>133</sup> Gary Pearce remembered these sessions well:

[England] used to train on the Monday evening, in the Midlands ... You’d go up there for 7.30, change, and you’d scrummage, really hard scrummage against props that were scrummaging props. I remember a few times I was going dizzy because there was so much pressure. That was hard work.<sup>134</sup>

Budge Rogers, who became England’s chairman of selectors in 1979, also recalled seeing the need to make some changes in the way the team was run. Recognising that volatility and inconsistency of selection was an issue – something that many players of the 1970s, in particular, consider to have been detrimental to England’s success – he announced that Bill Beaumont would be captain for the full 1979-80 season, and that any player who missed a game through injury would get his place back when fit again.<sup>135</sup> David Duckham, one of those who had played in the 1970s when selection changes had been made ‘far too regularly’ (‘It was criminally negligent of the selectors’, he said), commented that when England won the grand slam in 1980, the team management appeared to have a ‘different attitude, different approach. Much more, dare I say, professional’.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 46.

<sup>133</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>134</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>135</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>136</sup> Duckham, interview.

The grand slam season was not, however, a watershed moment. England players may have been training a little more than they used to, but this did not mean the old amateur culture had suddenly disappeared entirely. Gary Pearce recalled that during his first few years in the England team, for example, drinking in the days leading up to the match (including the night before) was still common:

It wasn't like, 'hang on, you can't drink, alcohol is not good for you', but it'll have been: 'oh, we're going out for a pint', just to get together. The camaraderie of those sort of days, it was more of a – 'well we are going to, night before, let's have a drink'. It wasn't till sort of mid-eighties that [people thought]: 'hang on, no you can't drink on the Friday night before an international'.<sup>137</sup>

Rory Underwood, too, remembered this being the case. He made his England debut in 1984, and shared a hotel room with Leicester teammate (and experienced England player) Dusty Hare. 'The Friday night he popped out for a couple of pints of Guinness with a couple of the team', Underwood remembered; 'that's the way it was in those days.'<sup>138</sup> In a similar story of what would now be regarded as questionable pre-match dietary preparation, Jonathan Webb remembered playing for the South West divisional team – effectively the level below international rugby in England – in the 1980s, and the team being taken 'to the Harvester at about half-twelve' to have 'a bloody massive Sunday roast – and kick-off was at three.'<sup>139</sup>

While training and performance were gradually being taken more seriously, then, and coaching was a firmly accepted and growing part of the sport, the vestiges of a more amateur outlook remained. England's approach to the inaugural World Cup in 1987 was a

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<sup>137</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>138</sup> Underwood, interview.

<sup>139</sup> Webb, interview.

case in point. Webb chuckled as he remembered that the team stayed in ‘a really dire hotel’, commenting that ‘everything was what you’d call really amateurish’. ‘Training’, he said, ‘was pretty intense – but the “play” was pretty intense as well. Several good nights out. In fact after the first game we then went and had a bit of “R and R” in Hamilton Island’. He recalled that ‘coaching was ok; not world-beating I’d say.’ In particular, he remembered there being ‘remarkably little goal kicking coaching’, commenting that, even as the team’s new goal kicker and a player who was only capped for the first time in that tournament, he was effectively left to his own devices with what was a key part of the team’s chances of victory.<sup>140</sup>

The very fact that the team was coached in any sustained or organised way at all, let alone playing in a World Cup competition, of course indicated that the game had made significant progress towards professionalism in the post-war era. It should be considered, too, that there may be a tendency for ex-players to frame such experiences in the context of what came afterwards, or of the present-day state of the sport, and thus emphasise the amateur nature of them. But there appears to be a great degree of agreement between those involved that, in England at least, it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the sport made its most meaningful strides to becoming professional in the way that its players were coached and prepared. After England were knocked out of the 1987 World Cup by Wales at the quarter-final stage, changes were made to the management of the team and Geoff Cooke, who was managing the North’s divisional team, took over. It is commonly accepted that Cooke – who was working as a sports development officer for Leeds City Council in 1987, before becoming chief executive of the newly created British Institute of Sports Coaches in 1989 – had a marked effect in terms of increasing the professionalism of the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

England team.<sup>141</sup> As Peter Winterbottom put it, ‘he transformed the whole set-up. He got Roger Uttley as coach, which was a great move ... [Cooke] was very good at sports management.’<sup>142</sup> Cooke and Uttley, according to Gary Pearce – who had by this stage been involved with the England team for over nine years – ‘developed’ the England team and evolved their approach to be ‘more professional with a small “p”, in the sense of the preparation for things and what they expected from players.’<sup>143</sup> As Jonathan Webb put it, Cooke was ‘definitely instrumental in trying to change the culture’ of the England team. This, Webb laughed as he pointed out, involved suggesting ‘that five pints on a Friday night was not the ideal preparation for an international – which met with a lot of resistance amongst the forwards, who genuinely felt that this was a great infringement on their human rights.’<sup>144</sup>

Cooke and his team aimed to bring England into a more modern era. With regards to team selection, Uttley recalled that ‘the idea was to bring a little bit of consistency and allow players to develop’. Thus the bold decision of making the twenty-two-year-old Will Carling captain was taken, with a view to building a successful team for the next World Cup.<sup>145</sup> There was also a particular focus on the fitness of the players. Prior to the 1987 World Cup, England had enlisted Tom McNab, a respected athletics coach, as a fitness advisor, and Cooke also brought in Rex Hazeldine, from Loughborough University’s Department of Physical Education and Sports Science. As Gary Pearce recalled, players’ fitness levels ‘were being monitored, players were being conditioned and they were trying

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<sup>141</sup> *The Times*, 1 March 1994.

<sup>142</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>144</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Uttley, interview.

to introduce a quality of training in terms of diet, mental preparation and testing regimes.<sup>146</sup> With regards to fitness testing, Webb commented:

I think I've still got my folder from that era, which ... put down the bleep test; press-ups, sit-ups; thirty- [and] 60-metre sprint times using proper ... camera sensors; 400 metre time, stuff like that; VO<sub>2</sub> max. So basically parameters of fitness and strength. And that was logged and you had a chart that [showed] you where everyone else was. [It was] a much more scientific approach.<sup>147</sup>

Rory Underwood, in his 1992 autobiography, wrote that the players 'became accustomed to receiving periodic reports on our fitness from Rex Hazeldine', as follows:

I received a daunting memo in June just before the tour [to Australia and Fiji, in 1991] which said: 'Your body fat has increased to 13.6 per cent and although it is still well within the range of 12-15 per cent, you need to carefully watch your diet (high carbohydrate, low fat) and with the increased training over the next two months, this value will come down again.'<sup>148</sup>

This, of course, was all far removed from the training regimes of decades gone by – and even from those of a few years before. It did not, it should be emphasised, signal a sudden or total change in the sport's performance culture – as Webb's words above on drinking suggest, elements of the amateur attitude remained built-in. John Mallett, for example, remembered the warm weather training camps in Lanzarote introduced by the England team in the early 1990s:

We started going on camps; we'd go to Lanzarote, warm weather training ... [Those trips] were physically demanding and you were around some of the best players in the country, but also they were a real eye-opener in that the guys would be in the bar the night before training and would train hard all day, but then kick on

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<sup>146</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>147</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>148</sup> Rory Underwood, *Flying Wing: An Autobiography* (London: Stanley Paul, 1992), 141–42.

in the evening ... [I have] vivid memories of that, the social side, versus [track athletes] Linford Christie and Colin Jackson out there training on the track ... [that was] pure sporting stuff, [whereas] the rugby players would roll out and there was probably a fair smell of beer around them – but then [they would] train bloody hard, so there was that real mix.

As Mallett went to say, though, as the game moved closer to professionalism in the 1990s, players were ‘starting to stop going out on a Friday night, and it was frowned upon if you were out the night before the game ... that was definitely beginning in the early 1990s.’<sup>149</sup> Rugby union’s attitude towards training and performance was noticeably and significantly changing. The English national team’s embrace of sports science and intense preparation for matches demonstrated, importantly, that the attitude of the sport had evolved to a point at which a professional outlook to performance had become fully accepted. In the 1991-92 edition of *The Rugby Union Who’s Who*, for example, a number of the players’ profiles list what the book calls their ‘touchlines’ – their interests outside the game. Neil Back, at that stage a young England B-team player (he would go on to win the World Cup with England in 2003), stated his main interest as ‘training five days a week for rugby’.<sup>150</sup>

In terms of training, coaching and performance, rugby union had evolved to become all but professional, with its amateur status – and with it the fact that players had to carry out their day jobs as well as play their sport – looking increasingly anachronistic and difficult to maintain. Underwood, for example, wrote in his autobiography of a wall chart which all England players had been given in 1990, which ‘outlined in graphic detail the two-year plan which we had to follow if we were to take part in the 1991 World Cup’. It was, he wrote, ‘a constant reminder of how much rugby was eating into our daily

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<sup>149</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>150</sup> Spink, *The Rugby Union Who’s Who 1991/92*, 14.

existence ... For amateur players, with daily jobs to sustain, it was a massive commitment of time and effort, of absence from the work place, from families.<sup>151</sup>

This acceptance of a more professional outlook within the sport indicated a changing attitude towards the importance of winning matches. The amateur tradition of playing the sport for its own sake, with victory as a secondary concern, was now totally absent from top-level rugby. Howard Marshall's words in 1954 (quoted in Chapter Two) – that 'the game is not intended for highly trained athletes but for reasonably fit men who like their exercise on a Saturday afternoon' – by now looked hopelessly dated.<sup>152</sup> Perhaps the main factor in this increase in the importance of winning matches was what Dunning and Sheard have called 'the formalisation of national and international competition'.<sup>153</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the RFU had introduced a national knockout competition for English clubs in the 1971-72 season, and merit tables in 1976. As Budge Rogers put it, though, 'you could never say which was the best club side in the country, because they didn't play all of [the others]'. There was, furthermore, no promotion or relegation in this informal set-up.<sup>154</sup> This all changed when a formal league structure was introduced in the 1987-88 season, primarily as a means of making English rugby union more competitive and thus improving the performance of the national side.<sup>155</sup> The new system, sponsored by Courage (a brewery), included clubs at many different levels, stretching to include over 1,000 clubs in over 100 divisions. For the first time, definitive 'champions' would be known at the end of each season, and teams would be incentivised

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<sup>151</sup> Underwood, *Flying Wing*, 141.

<sup>152</sup> Marshall, 'What Rugger Means to Me', 73.

<sup>153</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 252.

<sup>154</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 190; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 253; Rogers, interview.

<sup>155</sup> This was something that, as part of an RFU committee on leagues after his playing days, Rogers had advised against: 'I didn't think we should have leagues,' he said, 'because it would cause professionalism, or lead us down that road.' Rogers, interview.



by not only that but the possibility of promotion and relegation between leagues (as well as the promise of a haul of beer from the sponsors for any team scoring over fifty points in a match).<sup>156</sup>

With such incentives now in place, the results of club matches began to matter more. As a result, clubs began to adjust their practices both on and off the field. Gary Pearce recalled the impact of leagues at his club, Northampton:

There was a big coup at Northampton when the ‘Gang of Seven’, as it was known – this was 1988 – they effectively got rid of the old committee, who had their own ideas of how the club would go forward ... There was a big AGM ... and the old committee were put to one side, the new Gang of Seven were introduced, and things seemed to go forward from that date. They engaged the first full-time paid administrator in Barry Corless.

In terms of playing, league games quickly became more important than any others:

[Northampton] stopped doing their Easter tour because that seemed to get in the way of the important things, like the league. Because the league – no matter what the friendlies were, you might have a friendly against Leicester – but the result against Leicester in a friendly was irrelevant. The result in the league against Leicester was critical.

The changes at Northampton soon had an effect – in the 1989-90 season, they were promoted from division two to division one.<sup>157</sup>

While the new leagues, as Tony Collins has put it, ‘boosted crowds, club income and playing standards’, it was the introduction of a new competition at international level that acted as arguably the most powerful catalyst in the acceleration of the sport towards

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<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, 3 September 1987.

<sup>157</sup> Pearce, interview.

professionalism.<sup>158</sup> In the same year that had seen the league structure introduced in England, a rugby union World Cup took place for the first time, hosted by Australia and New Zealand. It was not a new idea, but much like the league and cup competitions in England, it was something that had been resisted by rugby union authorities for fear that it would represent a significant step towards professionalism. The RFU, for example, dismissed the idea of discussing a possible world cup in 1968, calling it ‘undesirable’, while in 1980, the IRB rejected two proposals from sports management companies ‘offering to promote a World Cup-type competition’. In the latter case, the Board resolved that it was unanimously and ‘totally’ opposed to the idea of a World Cup. Tellingly, the minutes of the meeting in which it was discussed devote twice as much space to the preceding point on the agenda: ‘the proposed new Board tie’ and the ‘wide range of designs’ thereof.<sup>159</sup>

The idea, however, would not go away. David Lord, an Australian journalist and promoter, caused a stir in 1983 by announcing a plan to sign 200 of the world’s top players to play in a global professional competition consisting of seven tournaments over three years. Players would receive over £90,000 each for taking part, and matches would be played all over the world, including, it was proposed, at Wembley. It was a plan conspicuously based on Kerry Packer’s World Series Cricket, but unlike its predecessor, it did not get off the ground, thanks mainly to a lack of solid financial backing. Suggestions that a large number of players had indicated their willingness to be involved, however, led the RFU to write to 120 English players to reiterate the rules around amateurism and to require them to sign a document committing themselves to it.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 196.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 198; Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the International Rugby Football Board, 19-20 March 1980, Edinburgh.

<sup>160</sup> *The Times*, 13 April 1983; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 255.

Such pressures meant it was, however, only a matter of time before a World Cup was organised. In June 1984, New Zealand raised the issue with the IRB and the following year the Board voted in favour of staging a World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. The inaugural competition took place in May and June of 1987, and though it was a significant step forward for the sport, it was nowhere near as big an event as it would later become. Peter Winterbottom, who played for England in the tournament, remembered it as ‘a bit of a shambolic affair’. For Gary Pearce, another of England’s squad members, ‘it was like any other tour’:

There wasn’t any media attention really. You weren’t getting the masses to the games. For an England-Australia game you might’ve got 15,000. And midweek games, two or three [thousand]. I mean the quarter-final I think, against Wales, which was in Brisbane, we only had 16,000, that was the maximum. So the crowds were less and the media attention was nowhere near like it is today.<sup>161</sup>

Pearce’s attendance estimates are largely accurate. England’s pool match against Australia was attended by 17,896, their matches against Japan and USA by 4,893 and 8,785 respectively, and their quarter-final against Wales by just 15,000.<sup>162</sup> As Rory Underwood put it, ‘most people wouldn’t have known there was a World Cup going on.’<sup>163</sup> England were knocked out after a poor performance against Wales in the quarter-finals. As Pearce put it, ‘the following day you go home, I’m afraid that’s it, you go home. So Saturday you play, Sunday you go home, and the Monday or Tuesday you’re back at work.’<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>162</sup> ‘ESPN Scrum Statsguru’.

<sup>163</sup> Underwood, interview.

<sup>164</sup> Pearce, interview.

Nonetheless, Pearce went to say, the 1987 World Cup was ‘the start of something ... each World Cup got bigger and bigger’.<sup>165</sup> Rory Underwood stated its importance very simply: it ‘was the start of the game going professional, really’. Similarly, Tony Collins comments in *The Oval World* that ‘the 1987 World Cup marked the beginning of the end for amateurism in rugby union.’<sup>166</sup> The next tournament was hosted by England, Ireland, France, Scotland and Wales. As Peter Winterbottom (who played in both 1987 and 1991) commented, it ‘was so much bigger than the ’87 World Cup’.<sup>167</sup> According to the IRB, total ticket sales increased from 600,000 in 1987 to 1,000,000 in 1991, the profit made by the tournament grew from £1 million to £4.1 million, and the number of countries watching on television increased remarkably from 17 to 103.<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Webb noted the increasing influence of television with regards to the 1991 tournament:

It was a bigger event. There was more media coverage. Jim Rosenthal did a really good job with ITV and came round with us. They had little pieces on players and did what’s absolutely normal nowadays, which completely didn’t exist in ’87. And of course our progression and improvement gripped the nation and everyone became more involved. All the matches were televised.<sup>169</sup>

There was also a sense that the World Cup was a truly important event in the rugby union calendar – one in which players, coaches and national unions were keen to perform well. This importance was reflected in the England team’s lengthy preparation, as outlined earlier. Webb commented that there was ‘a recognition that to win it was the mark of the quality of a side ... and that very quickly you realised that actually if you wanted to say you

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Collins, *Oval World*, 442.

<sup>167</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>168</sup> ‘Financing the Global Game’.

<sup>169</sup> Webb, interview.

were the best in the world then you'd have to win the World Cup.<sup>170</sup> Australia did so in 1991, beating England in the final at Twickenham, while South Africa, not long after Nelson Mandela had become president, symbolically won the trophy on home turf in 1995 – the last tournament to take place in the amateur era.

Victor Ubogu played for England at the 1995 World Cup, and said that 'it was amazing to be in South Africa and to see how that transformed the country.'<sup>171</sup> The story of South African success and the sudden superstardom of New Zealand's Jonah Lomu helped to propel the growth of the tournament even further. The profit margin of the 1995 World Cup was £17.6 million – over four times that of 1991 – while the tournament was watched in 124 countries and featured, including the qualifying matches, 52 different countries.<sup>172</sup> John Mallett was part of the England squad in South Africa, and recalled his overall sense that the sport was reaching new heights – and moving closer to professionalism as a result:

Seeing [the interest in the World Cup] grow all the time, both back home and on the tour as well, was an exciting time for rugby, and I think just at that time they were beginning to talk about rugby being professional when we got back and how that was all changing – so an incredible time to be part of it.<sup>173</sup>

By 1995 the Rugby World Cup had become the fourth largest world sports event, behind the football World Cup, the athletics World Championships and the Olympic Games.<sup>174</sup>

The existence of this now global, profit-making, widely televised international tournament put enormous pressure on an already creaking amateur edifice. In terms of English rugby, it combined with the introduction of formalised leagues to produce a significantly heightened

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ubogu, interview.

<sup>172</sup> 'Financing the Global Game'.

<sup>173</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>174</sup> Ian Stafford, 'Money Matters', *Rugby World*, June 1995.

sense of competition within the sport. The importance of winning, of working towards a trophy (or the avoidance of relegation), was now ever-present – and with it, a traditional pillar of amateurism was demolished for good.

Another major effect of the introduction of the World Cup was a significant swelling of the sport's coffers and the clearest indication of all of its earning potential. Above all other factors, it was the latter idea – the ever clearer fact that top-level rugby union was capable of generating large sums of money – that led to the collapse of amateurism. Though there had been indications of this before, especially with the introduction of sponsorship to the sport in previous decades, it was in the 1980s and 1990s that this became most pronounced, and the amounts too vast to prevent players from having a legitimate claim to take a share of the profits. The issue of players profiting from the sport reared its head in English rugby early in the 1980s. A high-profile controversy involving England players' dealings with the sportswear firm Adidas indicated the struggles that lay ahead for those intent on enforcing amateurism – and, crucially, demonstrated a lack of attachment to the ideal of amateurism on the part of the England squad. The controversy centred around the England players' unofficial relationship with Adidas. This had, as Roger Uttley's testimony in the previous chapter demonstrates, been in place for a number of years. In 1982, though, the secret – if, indeed it could be called so – was brought into the open; first by former England player Mike Burton's description in his autobiography of payments he and others had received, and then when Adidas divulged to the Inland Revenue the details of payments they had made to players.

Burton described how in 1974, prior to an international in France, he had been approached by John Cooper, a former Olympic track athlete and now Adidas salesman,

who handed him a pair of brand new Adidas boots and implored him to try them on.

Burton recalled:

I duly left the room and went into a toilet where I sat down and pulled on the first boot. However, I could hardly force my foot into the toe ... In the toe of the boot was a wad of packing paper and in amongst the paper were five £10 notes. 'How do they fit?' John asked as I emerged from the toilet. 'Perfect', I replied, and put them in my kitbag.

The Gloucester prop continued to receive a rate of £50 per match from Adidas as well as, like his England teammate Uttley, access to what Uttley called the 'gift of kit' room (referred to by Burton in his book as 'the "cage"').<sup>175</sup> By 1982, responsibility for Adidas dealings with the England players had been taken over by the ironically named Robin Money, himself a former Leicester player. Once the matter came out into the open, the RFU and other home unions met to decide on their course of action. The RFU ordered England players to black out any markings on their boots in the upcoming home game against Fiji.<sup>176</sup> Budge Rogers was England's chairman of selectors at the time, and in keeping with his belief in amateurism, was particularly unhappy about the situation – so much so that he wanted to punish who he thought was the ringleader by dropping him from the side:

Adidas were paying the players, some of them, to wear their boots ... And that was anathema to me ... I thought, I think I'm right too, that the centre of it for the players was [Peter] Wheeler, because the Adidas rep who was doing the negotiations was [Robin] Money [who had been a Leicester player, like Wheeler]. I went in and I said 'right, we're dropping Wheeler'. Which was a stupid thing to say. John Young immediately said 'Budge, hold on. What are the press going to do with

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<sup>175</sup> Burton, *Never Stay Down*, 179–80; Uttley, interview.

<sup>176</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1982.

this? What proof have you got?’ I said ‘I haven’t got any proof but I know!’ And, anyway, his sensibility prevailed and we didn’t drop Wheeler.<sup>177</sup>

The frailty of amateurism was highlighted by the fact that players had been happy to routinely break the rules and also by the fact that there was little that could be done by the rugby authorities. As J.V. Smith, who was President of the RFU at the time, put it, ‘We had reached a point where the cynic’s description of an ad hoc committee fitted perfectly; one which has no powers to do anything, and resolved that nothing could be done. And so it was to prove.’ The RFU met with Horst Dassler, the Chairman of Adidas, at the East India Club, where Dassler refused to hand over the names of any players involved.<sup>178</sup> The only solution for the RFU was to officially sanction a boot deal by signing up a manufacturer themselves to supply the England team. The deal went to Nike, who agreed to pay £90,000 over three years. Adidas, meanwhile, agreed a deal with the Welsh Rugby Union.<sup>179</sup> For Rogers, the controversy was part of a deterioration of his relationship with the players which contributed to him resigning his post at the end of the season. He recalled that the episode was significant in that it represented ‘just the beginnings of a chink of players wanting to be paid for playing’. Money was beginning to prove an irresistible force within the sport.<sup>180</sup>

In the 1980s and early 1990s, sponsorship money began to pour into Twickenham. Following on from the Nike deal, the RFU signed its first sponsorship deal for an international match in 1985 – a joint package with the Welsh Rugby Union which would

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<sup>177</sup> Rogers, interview.

<sup>178</sup> Smith, ‘*Good Morning, President*’, 17–18.

<sup>179</sup> *The Times*, 15 October 1983.

<sup>180</sup> Rogers sees the funny side now. He recalled a conversation he had a few years ago with Clive Woodward, an England player in Rogers’ period as a selector. Woodward reminded him of the poker games the players used to play on the night before a match, which Rogers used to join in with. ‘Trouble was’, said Woodward to Rogers, ‘you were losing your own money – we were just losing Adidas money!’ Rogers, interview.



see British Gas pay £500,000 to sponsor the annual match between the countries for the following four years (the WRU had been the first of the home unions to accept match sponsorship, doing so for the first time in 1980).<sup>181</sup> Two months later the RFU took its most significant step yet on the path to commercialisation by appointing Michael Coley as its first marketing manager.<sup>182</sup> Coley embodied the increasingly blurred lines between a professional, money-making world and an amateur sport. He had previously worked for Heinz and Estée Lauder, as well as running his own marketing consultancy, but was also the secretary of the south-west area of the London Referees' Society and had played for London Welsh and Harlequins. As he began his job, he stated his intention 'to raise £1 million a season for the RFU through sponsorship'. At the same time, he commented that 'when we draw up any contract, we make it absolutely clear where we stand on the question of amateurism.' 'Nike', he said, 'do have an agreement to supply boots to the England team, but that is as far as we're prepared to go.'<sup>183</sup> In reality, like the RFU's previous opposition to any form of sponsorship whatsoever of the sport, it was another line in the sand that was bound to be rubbed out. The RFU's attitude towards money in the sport was increasingly looking like doublethink.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw several more deals signed by the RFU. Toshiba paid £400,000 to sponsor the County Championship, while the new leagues launched in 1987 were sponsored by Courage for £1.6 million.<sup>184</sup> When the latter deal was renewed in 1993, the amount increased to £7 million. The only deal to match it at that point in terms of monetary value was ITV's payment of the same amount for the rights to broadcast the

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<sup>181</sup> *The Times*, 21 June 1985.

<sup>182</sup> *Guardian*, 16 August 1985.

<sup>183</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1985.

<sup>184</sup> Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, 251.

1991 World Cup.<sup>185</sup> English rugby union was, in this instance, moving with the times. As Arthur Marwick points out (quoting from a 1973 commercial research report), sports sponsorship had, in the 1960s, begun to become ‘an additional marketing medium for influencing a wider public’. While progress was at first ‘uneasy’, sports sponsorship in the UK expanded in the 1980s and by the beginning of the 1990s, as Holt and Mason point out, ‘over 1000 companies in Britain were injecting £200 million a year into a variety of sports, especially motor racing and football’.<sup>186</sup> Television, too, was an increasingly lucrative source of money for sport. The English Football League was paid £5.2 million by the BBC and ITV in 1983 to show league matches – by 1988, ITV were paying £44 million.<sup>187</sup>

Where, then, did the players stand among all this? On 6 February 1993, Robert Armstrong of the *Guardian* described how the Welsh Rugby Union were due to make £1.8 million from that afternoon’s international against England in Cardiff. Detailing how the money would be made up of funds from television fees, ticket sales, advertising, corporate hospitality, merchandising and programme sales, he commented that ‘the only people who seem unable to make a handsome profit ... from today’s over-subscribed fixture are the players who make it all possible.’<sup>188</sup> It was, as England player Rob Andrew wrote in *The Times* after the 1991 World Cup, ‘the great anomaly of rugby ... it is such a high-profile game and yet there is no money in it for the players.’<sup>189</sup> Even at a point when millions of pounds were generated by each international match, those creating the spectacle were still forbidden from making any money directly from their sport.

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<sup>185</sup> *Guardian*, 31 March 1993.

<sup>186</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 317; Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 165.

<sup>187</sup> Tony Collins, *Sport in Capitalist Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 118.

<sup>188</sup> *Guardian*, 6 February 1993.

<sup>189</sup> *The Times*, 6 November 1991.

The increased marketability of rugby did mean that opportunities for smaller, more indirect gains were growing all the time. A helping hand in the world of work was, as has been demonstrated, one area in which this was the case. Elsewhere players similarly benefited – where possible under the regulations of amateurism – from the desire of firms and brands to be associated with them. Gary Pearce, for example, was ‘provided with a sponsored Mercedes’ in 1992 ‘by a local garage in Northampton’. It was, he said ‘through rugby and who I was at the time ... [It] wouldn’t have happened otherwise.’ Pearce also recalled that there was no longer any need for discreet visits to the warehouses of sportswear firms to obtain new kit:

There was more and more kit being provided to yourselves, to your family. That was like a little bonus. I mean both my boys, everywhere they went they had Nike tracksuits on. And they weren’t bought, that was part of the gifts from Nike in the sense of sponsorship.<sup>190</sup>

John Mallett, too, recalled ‘the perks of being involved with England’:

We had a launch of the [1995] World Cup, where there were ... Church’s shoes, Ray-Ban sunglasses ... a Cellnet mobile phone, which at the time was very exciting. Everyone got their squad phone number and had a mobile phone bill paid, which was pretty fantastic – till you got dropped ... We’d go to those England ‘A’ weekends and invariably come back with a boot full of Scrumpy Jack cider or Courage Best Bitter ... You’d rarely go to a friend’s barbecue without a nice stack of Scrumpy Jack cider.<sup>191</sup>

Nonetheless, such gains were small compared with the vast sums of money now being banked by rugby union’s authorities, and the theoretical earnings available to top-level players through marketing, media and other opportunities. These avenues were still

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<sup>190</sup> Pearce, interview.

<sup>191</sup> Mallett, interview. England ‘A’ refers to England’s reserve team.

largely closed off to English players. While other unions, such as those of the southern hemisphere, were more relaxed about players earning money in such ways, the RFU resisted as much as possible the idea that England players should be allowed to profit in any way from their involvement in the sport. The aforementioned Robert Armstrong of the *Guardian* summed the situation up particularly succinctly when he wrote, in 1990, that ‘money talks louder in rugby union the further you travel from Twickenham’.<sup>192</sup> Will Carling expressed the feelings of many players about this when he stated in 1990 that ‘players with a public profile generated by the effort they put in should be allowed to benefit financially from any endorsement that takes place away from the game’. Showing the lack of deference to his superiors that was mentioned earlier in this chapter (and also confirming the impact of the introduction of leagues on amateurism), he went on to directly question the English rugby authorities: ‘why should the RFU be able to say you cannot benefit from your public image? Basically I think the RFU sealed their own fate by bringing a league structure into an amateur game.’<sup>193</sup> A typical example of the gulf between potential and actual earnings was described by Gareth Chilcott in his 1990 autobiography. He recalled being approached to appear in an advertising campaign for a low-alcohol lager, for which his fee went to charity:

I agreed to do the job and was taken to a studio in London for the shot. The week before they took my picture, [England cricketer] Ian Botham had been photographed in there to promote another commercial product and I can assure you his fee was not £500 to be given to charity. It was very considerably more ... If rugby were not an amateur game I could easily have asked [for] and got ten times [my] fee.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *Guardian*, 23 March 1990.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Chilcott, *Cooch*, 66.

By the end of the 1980s, and with the second World Cup approaching, the situation regarding payments to players was by far the most pressing issue in rugby union. That much is reflected in the comments of numerous players in the 1991-92 edition of *The Rugby Union Who's Who*; a compendium of profiles of all major players in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (sponsored, in keeping with the times, by Save & Prosper). In it, players were asked for their 'suggestions to improve rugby off-field'. Again and again, the same themes appeared: reimburse players for loss of earnings, and allow them to use their profile to earn money away from the sport.<sup>195</sup> Contact with players from abroad, for example on tours or at the 1987 World Cup, had shown British and Irish players – particularly those from England, Scotland and Ireland, as payments of various forms were often alleged to be widespread in Wales – that the supposedly worldwide rules on amateurism were not being adhered to in other nations.<sup>196</sup> Brian Moore, for example, recalled that:

By the mid-1980s, it was well known, but not admitted, that players in France, Wales and South Africa were paid for playing. In Australia and New Zealand, the players' careers were being organised so that they could have whatever leave was required to enable them to train and play ... I came back from the 1987 World Cup knowing which players had their own companies, through which they channelled payments.<sup>197</sup>

Peter Winterbottom had experienced a much more relaxed attitude to amateurism in South Africa, for example, when playing for Transvaal in the late 1980s during the English off-season. He commented that the sport there 'was in many respects professional. We got

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<sup>195</sup> Spink, *The Rugby Union Who's Who 1991/92*.

<sup>196</sup> On payments to Welsh players see, for example, the allegations made by Scott Gibbs (a Welsh international) shortly after switching codes to rugby league in 1994: 'Every player in Wales knows when you play on Saturday you get a few quid ... The only difference in being a league player is that I now pay tax and National Insurance.' *Guardian*, 2 August 1994.

<sup>197</sup> Moore, *Beware of the Dog*, 249.

very good expenses, everything laid on, you'd get a car, they'd find you somewhere to live' (there are similarities between this and Nigel Horton's experience in France, as related in the previous chapter).<sup>198</sup> Indeed, as Adrian Smith has written, 'By the time South Africa officially returned to international rugby, in 1992, SARFU was not simply turning a blind eye to professionalism, but actively encouraging it.'<sup>199</sup> Ian Beer was President of the RFU when England toured South Africa in 1994, and described learning during the tour the extent of payment taking place there. Even South Africa's deputy president F.W. de Klerk mentioned it to Beer, telling him that players were paid in South Africa and that he could not understand why they were not in England.<sup>200</sup>

It was in this environment that the IRB decided in 1990 to relax its rules on players earning money away from the pitch. They would be allowed to 'receive material benefits from any form of communication, written, oral or visual, provided that the reward does not derive from the game', and could also 'participate in advertising or product endorsement provided it has no rugby connection'.<sup>201</sup> Confusion, however, reigned, with discretionary powers given to individual national unions to enforce the rules as they saw fit, and with the RFU at one point threatening to leave the IRB over what they saw as an unacceptable dilution of the game's amateur principles.<sup>202</sup> This indicated the extent to which English rugby's governing body was still at the conservative end of the sport. With change seemingly on the horizon, England's players set out to find a way to profit from the new regulations in a manner that might be agreeable to the RFU. Led, as Jonathan Webb recalled, 'by Rob Andrew and Brian [Moore]', they 'set up a company to try and do it

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<sup>198</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>199</sup> Smith, 'Civil War in England', 151.

<sup>200</sup> Ian Beer, 'Your Visit', 19 February 2015.

<sup>201</sup> Richards, *Hooligans*, 225.

<sup>202</sup> *Guardian*, 19 March 1991.

officially rather than have boys doing it under the radar'. The company was named Player Vision and through it – in partnership with a specialist agency, Parallel Media – the players created a scheme called 'Run with the Ball'. The idea was that the players would raise a sum of money through their own promotional work; part of that would then be put back into the game through the RFU, while a smaller amount would be kept and shared among the players. '[The scheme] agreed to pay the RFU a million on the basis that we would earn two million', recalled Webb.<sup>203</sup>

The scheme, however, did not quite go to plan. Firstly it had a lengthy administrative approval process to go through and then, though it did eventually meet with the approval of both the RFU and the IRB, securing money from sponsors was not quite as straightforward as had been predicted. This, according to Brian Moore, was partly due to the fact that Dudley Wood, the staunchly amateur secretary of the RFU, independently contacted potential sponsors to warn them that any payments would be against RFU rules (despite the fact that, according to Moore, RFU president Michael Peary had accompanied him to meetings to assure companies that it had the full backing of the RFU).<sup>204</sup> As it turned out, 'Run with the Ball' – which ran until professionalism arrived in 1995 – did not make as much money as hoped, though the players did eventually receive a small amount; 'something like £7,000 for each of the two years before the game went professional', according to Moore.<sup>205</sup> For English rugby players the episode represented, thought Webb, 'the painful birth of a commercial-type set-up – which didn't start terribly well to begin with'.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>204</sup> Moore, *Beware of the Dog*, 257–58.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>206</sup> Webb, interview.

It was a birth nonetheless. With regards to the struggle between amateurism and professionalism across the post-war era, this particular episode was a microcosm of the state the sport had reached by the early 1990s. The innate conservatism of English rugby union was still at play – represented most prominently in these years, it seems, by Dudley Wood – but it had become virtually powerless to resist the march of money and modernity. As Rory Underwood put it of ‘Run with the Ball’, ‘the game had changed, the game was going towards being more professional, so ... privately [the RFU] may have been grumbling and whatever, but officially they couldn’t do anything about it.’<sup>207</sup> The amateur ideal (and, to an extent, deference to those in charge of the sport who cherished amateurism) was being shown to be fatally brittle.

That much was demonstrated by the breaking of the ultimate taboo of amateurism – being paid for playing. In general, top-level players in this era seem to have had few worries about the ideological side of accepting money for playing the sport. Aside from the alleged regularity with which players were paid in countries like South Africa, France and Wales, this was demonstrated most prominently by two particular episodes. The first of these was the World XV invitational series played in South Africa in 1989 to celebrate the South African Rugby Board’s centenary. Despite South Africa’s supposed exile from international rugby, the two matches played between the Springboks and a visiting team of international players were officially recognised by the IRB. That did not stop the World XV squad, however, from making tens of thousands of pounds each from the endeavour, as was revealed when parts of a previously secret Welsh Rugby Union report into the tour were leaked in 1993. As the report put it of the ten Welsh players who took part, ‘At least one of the players received at least £30,000 and others as much or broadly comparable

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<sup>207</sup> Underwood, interview.



figures.<sup>208</sup> Brian Moore has described how the 1989 British Lions squad heard of the invitation to take part while on their tour to Australia, with captain Finlay Calder leading a secret meeting to discuss it. As Moore put it, it was relayed to them that they ‘had been promised payment – proper payment, not inflated expenses’. Moore and others even went to meet an agent from South Africa’s First National Bank who, he says, ‘were putting up the cash’. Eventually the figure offered to Moore was £40,000. He did not end up taking part, but not because he was worried about breaking regulations or because of an attachment to the sanctity of amateurism – instead, because there were partners at his law firm who objected to him going on the tour either because of the time he would have to take off work or because of political objections to the idea of touring South Africa. As for amateurism, and the possibility of having to lie to the RFU if they required a statement from him saying he had not received any money, Moore wrote: ‘Would I have lied for such a sum? Yes, given the duplicity of everyone else in the amateurism debate. I would have done so without a twang of conscience.’<sup>209</sup> He was not alone.

The second episode that showed how little the majority of top-level rugby union players now cared for amateurism as an ideal took place just before the sport was formally declared open. An attempt in 1995, similar to that of David Lord in 1983, by a proposed professional rugby union circuit – named the World Rugby Corporation and led by former Australian international Ross Turnbull (with the supposed backing of Kerry Packer) – to sign up the world’s top players was remarkably close to being successful. John Mallett, part of the England squad at the time, recalled this happening and described the form it took at Bath, his club:

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<sup>208</sup> *Guardian*, 5 February 1993.

<sup>209</sup> Moore, *Beware of the Dog*, 249–54.

There was ... at the time the potential for a world series to come off – this was beyond the RFU and the clubs. And we were all contacted as players with the potential to be part of this ... There were secret meetings going on behind the scenes ... [It] was driven by an Australian businessman [and] was very much worldwide. We were contacted by our club captains ... and said, ‘Look guys, we’re going to meet in this accountant’s in Bath, and we’re going to have this discussion about the world series of rugby.’ And there’s a guy who stands at the front, who I think was maybe South African or Australian, who said ‘look, [we’ll pay you] tens of thousands of pounds to play rugby. You might not be able to play for Bath anymore – we’d tell where you were going to go and play, but you’d play in a world series.’<sup>210</sup>

Numerous meetings like this happened across the major rugby union-playing nations as Turnbull attempted to secure the signatures of all the world’s top players. Mallett recalled how much the idea appealed to him and his teammates:

It all sounded very exciting, and players sat around and debated it and things. In a fairly short space of time, most if not all the players signed up to that, and those contracts went to a lawyer’s for safekeeping, for when there was a key point in that process where all the countries [agreed] – and we’d spoken to other friends and teams, and [players from] Scotland and Wales and whatever were all signing up to this thing.<sup>211</sup>

Certain players, like Brian Moore, were enlisted by Turnbull to sell the idea to their national teammates. Moore recalled that he ‘had several meetings with ... Ross Turnbull’, that he ‘and a few other players obtained the signatures of about thirty of England’s top players’, and that ‘similar numbers from Wales, New Zealand, Australia, France and South Africa signed’.<sup>212</sup> The scheme looked like it might succeed until, as Mallett put it, ‘the South

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<sup>210</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Moore, *Beware of the Dog*, 260.

Africans pulled out of it ... and that basically pulled the plug on the whole world series thing – which we all thought was going to happen’.<sup>213</sup> The South African side, led by captain Francois Pienaar, decided to sign instead with their national union, who were also offering them paid contracts thanks to a US\$555 million television deal signed, alongside the Australian and New Zealand unions, with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation.<sup>214</sup> Given that the Springboks were the new world champions and were essential to the success of the project, and given also that there was increasing hesitancy from Packer to commit the necessary money to the project, the World Rugby Corporation collapsed.<sup>215</sup> Though the scheme had ultimately failed, the message from the players’ point of view was loud and clear – whichever the organisation signing the cheque, they were more than happy to be paid for playing their sport.

It was, certainly in Britain, an attitude in keeping with the times. In his *Social History of England*, Asa Briggs noted the extent of change in sport between the 1930s and 1990s, commenting that many of the changes ‘reflect[ed] market economics’.<sup>216</sup> This was the case with rugby union in the 1980s and 1990s. The Conservative election victory of 1979 had brought to power a government and, particularly, a prime minister with an ‘intellectual commitment to removing restrictions to free trade and facilitating entry to markets’.<sup>217</sup> The deregulation of the City, the sweeping privatisation of previously nationalised industries and the cutting of tax rates characterised what Lawrence James has called ‘the perceived

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<sup>213</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>214</sup> The three southern hemisphere unions were particularly worried about the potential player drain to Murdoch’s recently created ‘Super League’ rugby league competition, which was offering players hugely increased salaries. The unions therefore teamed up to sell the broadcast rights to a new provincial ‘Super 12’ competition and Tri Nations international series.

<sup>215</sup> For the full story of the World Rugby Corporation, see Peter FitzSimons, *The Rugby War*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2003).

<sup>216</sup> Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1999), 316.

<sup>217</sup> Stewart, *Bang!*, 410.

triumph of Mammon and its priorities' under the Thatcher governments of the 1980s.<sup>218</sup> It was a decade in which money became more conspicuous and the open acquisition of it more acceptable. In a speech to the Conservative Central Council in 1985, for example, Margaret Thatcher bemoaned the 'consistent tendency in our society to downgrade the creators of wealth', adding that the 'critics' who did so – often to be found 'in cloister and common room' – could not 'stomach that ... wealth creators have a tendency to acquire wealth in the process of creating it for others.' Describing her admiration for those who started 'some of our finest companies', she commented that 'they were ambitious to make money – yes, and what's wrong with that?' What she admired was 'success earned through individual effort' – and success, importantly, was equated with money.<sup>219</sup>

This was, for example, a time in which the term 'yuppie' – which described the 'young upwardly mobile professionals' making money in the likes of the City, property and advertising – came into common usage, and a time in which the *Sunday Times Rich List* was first published ('The equivalent of a *Debrett's* for the new plutocracy', as Graham Stewart has aptly described it).<sup>220</sup> Thatcher, wrote her biographer Hugo Young, 'cast aside British guilt about material advance'; her brand of Conservatism, said her Secretary of State for Education in 1988, gave 'increased scope ... to what might be called acquisitive individualism'.<sup>221</sup> Crucially, as Brian Harrison has pointed out, this involved 'a resolute defence of middle-class individualism' – a belief that, as Thatcher put it herself, the middle

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<sup>218</sup> James, *The Middle Class: A History*, 466.

<sup>219</sup> 'Speech to Conservative Central Council, 23 March 1985', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, accessed 14 July 2017, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106000>.

<sup>220</sup> Stewart, *Bang!*, 412.

<sup>221</sup> Hugo Young, *One of Us* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 526; Kenneth Baker quoted *Ibid.*

classes should not feel guilty ‘about climbing the ladder of success’ and receiving ‘fair incentives and rewards for skill and hard work’.<sup>222</sup>

It was in this societal context, then, that rugby union began to move with greater pace than it had previously done towards professionalism. As a middle-class, conservative sport, it – consciously or not – reflected the dominant trends of middle-class, conservative society in 1980s Britain. Most clearly, players’ increasing calls to be rewarded monetarily for the work they put into the sport and the lucrative product they created directly mirrored the rhetoric of a decade of Thatcherism. When Will Carling said, as quoted earlier, that ‘players with a public profile generated by the effort they put in should be allowed to benefit financially’, his words reflected what was now the accepted wisdom of the marketplace.<sup>223</sup> Rugby union players had become wealth creators; it was only fair, they came to believe, that they were allowed to ‘acquire wealth in the process of creating it for others’.<sup>224</sup> To put it more simply, as Jonathan Webb did, ‘Inevitably there’s a feeling that look, if I’m playing this much and committing this much it would be nice to be paid.’<sup>225</sup>

## Conclusion

‘England’, writes Huw Richards in his *History of Rugby Union*, ‘had not wanted professionalism and was uneasy with its consequences’.<sup>226</sup> Incoming RFU president Dennis Easby had declared at the institution’s 1994 annual general meeting that ‘the Rugby Football Union’s stance that the game must remain amateur is as strong tonight as in the

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<sup>222</sup> Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 146–47.

<sup>223</sup> *Guardian*, 23 March 1990.

<sup>224</sup> ‘Speech to Conservative Central Council, 23 March 1985’.

<sup>225</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>226</sup> Richards, *Hooligans*, 249.

past'.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, there had been 'more than a hint of King Canute in the RFU's stance', as Tony Collins put it.<sup>228</sup> Though the waves of money were about to wash over the sport, those in charge had spent their time trying to hold them back, rather than preparing for their inevitable arrival. This meant that when an open sport was declared, the RFU was slow to act; others, however, were not. Sir John Hall, the multi-millionaire owner of Newcastle United FC, was quickest – he bought Gosforth and 'offered Rob Andrew £750,000 over five years to lift [them] from the bottom of Courage Division Two to the championship title.'<sup>229</sup> Rory Underwood, towards the end of his career as a player at the time, recalled the situation:

The RFU in its wisdom said 'we will take a year to consider [professionalism]... we're putting a one year's moratorium on it.' Well, while they were having their one-year moratorium, the Sir John Halls of the world went 'right, Rob, here's a shed-load of money' ... The unions in Australia, New Zealand, wherever – they all went to the players and signed the players up. Whereas England didn't. So all the clubs signed the players – and that's the way we have it now.<sup>230</sup>

As Richards has written, 'Hopes of an orderly transition were dashed'.<sup>231</sup> The RFU was, at heart, an amateur organisation – in a newly professional world, it had suddenly been left behind. A series of 'acrimonious talks between the ... clubs and Twickenham during 1996' – and years of wrangling beyond that – lay ahead.<sup>232</sup>

In Paul Addison's most recent survey of post-war Britain, *No Turning Back*, he asks the question (referring to the title of the chapter that he is concluding), 'How then to sum

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<sup>227</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 8 July 1994, London.

<sup>228</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 210.

<sup>229</sup> Smith, 'Civil War in England', 156–57.

<sup>230</sup> Underwood, interview.

<sup>231</sup> Richards, *Hooligans*, 249.

<sup>232</sup> Ian Malin, *Mud, Blood and Money: English Rugby Union Goes Professional* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1997), 28.

up “Mrs Thatcher’s revolution”?’ One of the ‘certain’ consequences, Addison believes, was ‘the transfer of power from state to the market’.<sup>233</sup> It is a fitting way to consider the change that came to English rugby union in this time. The ‘state’ – the RFU, English rugby’s controlling body – had previously been firmly in charge, able to direct matters according to what it felt were the best interests of the sport. In the 1980s and early 1990s, however, it increasingly ceded power to the ‘market’ – the coming commercial force of television, marketing and sponsorship. The difference in rugby union’s case was that the transfer of power happened in spite of, not at the behest of, those in charge.

With this struggle playing out around them, the role of English rugby union’s players is a particularly interesting one to consider. What ultimately led to them becoming professional sportsmen was not so much a fervent desire for professionalism, but an increasingly ambivalent attitude to amateurism. While some players were particularly active in pursuing change (Brian Moore, for example), many others were more passive. As can be seen in their statements in the aforementioned *Rugby Union Who’s Who* of 1991-92, many players did not mind the game being amateur, so long as they were compensated for time devoted to rugby, or allowed to earn money from endorsements.<sup>234</sup> It was a mixed approach based neither in ideological attachment to amateurism nor in attachment to professionalism, but in day-to-day pragmatism. As Jonathan Webb put it of professionalism, for example, ‘I think some of the players didn’t necessarily realise what that meant, that that becomes your job’.<sup>235</sup> Rugby union players wanted to be paid not necessarily to revolutionise their sport along free-market lines, but simply because they felt they deserved some reward for the effort they were putting in. Crucially, a lack of any

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<sup>233</sup> Addison, *No Turning Back*, 313–14.

<sup>234</sup> Spink, *The Rugby Union Who’s Who 1991/92*.

<sup>235</sup> Webb, interview.

strong attachment to the traditional ideal of amateurism meant such desires were given voice.

Despite a certain degree of change, the social foundations of English rugby union remained largely unaltered in the 1980s and early 1990s. By all measures, it remained a disproportionately middle-class sport. The major change that did come to the sport – the collapse of amateurism – thus in many ways reflected the behaviour of the middle classes in this era. As Lawrence James points out, the middle classes were far from unequivocally supportive of the Thatcherite revolution. Where Thatcherism did successfully bring together many of them, though, was in the way that it provided a ‘host to misgivings about the old upper-middle-class elites’, and in the way that it attracted a ‘large swathe of the middle class’ by proving ‘the lubricant of personal prosperity’.<sup>236</sup> The same can be said of England’s rugby union players. While they may not all have been at the vanguard of change, their ‘misgivings’ about the ‘old upper-middle-class elite’ in charge of the sport and a natural concern for their own ‘personal prosperity’ saw them ultimately side with the new professional world ahead of the old amateur one.

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<sup>236</sup> James, *The Middle Class: A History*, 464–67.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Before each game, going through that cycle of anticipation on the Friday night, waking up in the morning, seeing what the weather was like – firm track, wet track, wind blowing, what direction, bright sun, who we playing, who am I playing with? That terrible feeling in your stomach beforehand – ‘I’ve got to go through all this again.’ This thought that you were going out to do battle would be one of the things crossing your mind, particularly in the big games. Waiting to receive the kick-off knowing that there are eight guys down there ready to knock the living daylights out of you. Making sure that it was my ball. Once you’d got the ball, bang, down on the deck, your mates around you – it’s just another game.

*Roger Uttley, interview.*

Just another game. If anything stayed constant about English rugby union in the post-war period, it was this. Whoever the player, whichever the teams, whatever the venue, there were thirty players on the pitch, one oval ball, two sets of posts and a game to be played. As Gary Pearce said of his England debut at Twickenham, ‘You just go out there and play. When you play rugby, whether you’re playing in front of 55,000 or at Aylesbury playing in front of twenty guys and a dog, you still go out there and play your game.’<sup>1</sup> Just as Micky Steele-Bodger did in the first official post-war England match at a bomb-stricken

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<sup>1</sup> Pearce, interview.

Cardiff Arms Park in 1947, so too did John Mallett winning his first cap, as a substitute in a World Cup match against Western Samoa at Durban in 1995.

To properly survey the history of a sport, though, is to acknowledge the broader context in which it takes place – its ties to the society of which it is a part. Just as, as quoted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, ‘sport is immensely important to any serious attempt to reconstruct a nation’s collective life’, so too is a nation’s collective life important in any serious attempt to reconstruct a sport.<sup>2</sup> One of the chief aims of this study has been to chart the extent of both change and continuity in English rugby union, and through that, to observe what the sport can tell us about the wider social history of the post-war England. So, after investigating the lives and experiences of players, what can we conclude?

The most obvious change that happened in rugby union in this time, acknowledged by the periodisation of this study, is that it ceased to be an amateur sport. The gradual decline of amateurism and the concomitant rise of professionalism was perhaps the most prominent trend to emerge from the testimony of players in the post-war era. Change across the period as a whole is less obvious when interview testimony is viewed individually. Those who played in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, still tended to emphasise the amateurism of the sport in their time, framing their experiences in the context of the current, ultra-professional state of rugby union. When the experiences of players across the period are compared, though, it becomes clear that a gradual change did take place – that the way in which the England team operated, in particular, was far more professional in the early 1990s than it was in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus Chris Winn ‘probably didn’t [even] change [clothes] entirely’ when he and his teammates ‘limber[ed] up’ the day before an England game in the early 1950s, whereas Jonathan Webb and those who

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<sup>2</sup> Hennessy, *Having It So Good*, 88.

played in the early 1990s had their VO<sub>2</sub> max and bleep test times regularly monitored.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the latter made his England debut in a World Cup competition and competed in sponsored league and cup matches for his club side – all things that would have seemed unthinkable to the former.

What caused this change in rugby union's outlook and, eventually, its status? The post-war period was one in which British sport in general saw a shift in attitude towards professionalism. As noted in Chapter Three, cricket abolished the distinction between 'gentlemen' and 'players' in 1963, and tennis became open in 1967. In football, the maximum wage and retain and transfer systems were abolished in the early 1960s, while in athletics – a sport with similarly firm amateur regulations to those of rugby union – amateurism was gradually eroded by a series of changes which had a 'revolutionary' impact on the sport.<sup>4</sup> As Martin Polley has put it, the post-war period was a time in which there was both a 'growth of professional identities and assertiveness amongst sports professionals' and an 'acceptance of professionalism in a number of sports that had traditions of hostility towards pay for play'.<sup>5</sup> Rugby union, of course, was one of the latter.

Among this shift towards professionalism, it is clear that rugby union's amateur status became increasingly anachronistic. The growing trend of 'commercial and media investment' in sport that Polley sees as a major cause of the above changes spread to rugby union and, as has been demonstrated, began to have a greater influence on it.<sup>6</sup> As Tony Collins has put it, money acted as a 'solvent' that began in the post-war period to 'dissolve

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<sup>3</sup> Winn, interview; Webb, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Polley, "The Amateur Rules": Amateurism and Professionalism in Post-War British Athletics', in *Amateurs and Professionals in Post-War British Sport*, ed. Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the grip of tradition' on English rugby union.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the introduction of formal competitions such as domestic leagues and the World Cup is particularly acknowledged by players as acting as a catalyst for professionalism. As John Mallett put it, professionalism 'became an inevitable consequence of the World Cups and things like that – once they'd had a World Cup, it was always taking it in that direction.'<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, sport was not changing in a bubble of its own – it was influenced by changes happening around it. The post-war period was a time in which, as Harold Perkin argued, England became 'a society which accepted in principle that ability and expertise were the only respectable justification for recruitment to positions of authority and responsibility'; one, indeed, 'in which people find their place according to trained expertise and the service they provide'. In other words, it became a 'professional society'.<sup>9</sup> Rugby union players increasingly came to perceive that they were trained experts – that they were providing a service to spectators and governing bodies alike. Peter Winterbottom, for example, talked of the 'pressure put on the players to train harder, to become more professional in [their] attitude' throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. 'Well', he said in assessing the crucial consequence of that, 'if the Union is putting pressure on people to do that ... they're going to have to be recompensed.'<sup>10</sup> As a money trader in the post-Big Bang City, Winterbottom no doubt understood that in Thatcher's Britain, top rugby union players were wealth creators. As the Prime Minister herself put it, if they sought financial reward for their efforts – 'what's wrong with that?'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 189.

<sup>8</sup> Mallett, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 405; *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>10</sup> Winterbottom, interview.

<sup>11</sup> 'Speech to Conservative Central Council, 23 March 1985'.

Such societal and sporting trends provided the conditions necessary for rugby union to become professional. This study has shown that a lack of deeply held, ideological belief in amateurism on the part of players was also crucial in bringing about this change. If all those playing the game had believed unshakeably in the amateur ideology throughout this period, the sport would have remained amateur. The fact that it did not suggests that this was not the case. The evidence provided by this study, indeed, suggests a previously unexplored level of latent ambivalence towards amateurism among rugby union players that stretches further back in time than the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rugby union players were a largely conservative group of people who tended to accept the status quo (this outlook is seen most strikingly in the issue of South Africa, where so few challenged the orthodox view that sport and politics should not mix). What much of the interview testimony suggests is that while there were no outright challenges to amateurism for much of the period, players may not have had as strong an ideological attachment to amateurism as is commonly assumed. Instead, they appear often to have simply accepted it as the way of things, or to have given the matter little thought. By looking beyond the usual ‘stereotypes’, as Dominic Sandbrook has written of the 1960s, we see that, for many people, ‘the reality of daily life was rather different’.<sup>12</sup> Chris Winn, for example, who played for England in the early 1950s, said: ‘We didn’t call it amateurism because there wasn’t anything else really.’ Ted Woodward said: ‘Being amateur? Never thought anything about it.’ Peter Ford, who played in the early 1960s, said: ‘It’s what we’d been brought up with, we didn’t know any different.’ John Pullin, former England captain and record cap-holder, said of amateurism that ‘you didn’t have any opinion really’ – and went on to comment that ‘if, like now, they were paying you to play then yeah – good news isn’t it? Because you love

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<sup>12</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, xvii.

playing.’<sup>13</sup> The latter part of that quotation demonstrates a variation on this theme, in fact – that players were happy that they played as amateurs, but equally said they would play as professionals if they found themselves in the modern era. Alan Old summed this up when he said:

I’m glad I played when I did, and I’m pretty sure that most of them would be. Having said that, if I was a young lad playing rugby now, I’d be trying to do my best and get as far as I could. Because that’s the system that’s in place.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, as outlined in Chapter Three, the hostility of rugby union towards the professional code of rugby league was not driven by the players, but by those in charge of the sport. Players often had more pragmatic views on the matter, rather than ideological beliefs.

While amateurism was entrenched in English rugby union for much of this period, then, this study shows that its foundations among players across the post-war era, largely unexamined to date, were perhaps not as sturdy as would be assumed. The reason that the sport stayed amateur for so long was not, in other words, down to the strongly held beliefs of players, but because of the long history of amateurism within the sport, the willingness of administrators to prolong it and the lack of proper conditions to seriously challenge it.<sup>15</sup> When those conditions arrived many were surprised that the amateur edifice fell so easily. John Pullin, for example, said that he ‘was very surprised by how quickly it did happen, eventually’, whereas Tony Collins points out that Dudley Wood was still claiming on the

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<sup>13</sup> Winn, interview; Woodward, interview; Ford, interview; Pullin, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Old, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Administrators, in the RFU at least, appear to have operated in a culture in which the ideological idea of amateurism was more cherished than it was among players. This was perhaps due to the nature of performing a role that involved a level of responsibility for the sport as a whole, and doing so within a historic institution with deep ties to the sport’s creation. It was noticeable that the most enthusiastic supporters of amateurism within the interviewee body tended to be those who became administrators after they had finished playing – Budge Rogers, for example, or Micky Steele-Bodger.

eve of professionalism that ‘if you say to the England players “do you want to be a contracted, full-time professional rugby player?” I promise you the answer is no’.<sup>16</sup> Wood, though, was perhaps not entirely wrong. As Jonathan Webb said of professionalism (as quoted in Chapter Four), ‘I think some of the players didn’t necessarily realise what that meant, that that becomes your job’.<sup>17</sup> Most players, in other words, were not absolutely attached to either status – they simply wanted to play their sport under conditions that allowed them to do so with relative ease and comfort. Amateurism had survived for so long in this era because there had been little reason, among a relatively conservative and well-off group of people, to challenge it as the status quo – not because English rugby union players held a deep, ideological attachment to it.

While, therefore, English rugby union undoubtedly shifted significantly along the amateur-professional spectrum in the post-war period, there was perhaps more of an element of continuity among the attitudes of those involved in the sport than has previously been explored. One area in which continuity was also evident was the nature of English rugby union’s connection with education. This is clear from analysis of the educational backgrounds of England players in the period, as has been demonstrated in this thesis. Over the whole period, 20 per cent of players capped by England had attended a non-selective state secondary school, 33 per cent had attended a grammar school and 49 per cent had been educated at a private school. Across the three periods that make up the structure of this thesis, those from state schools increased steadily from 11 per cent between 1947 and 1959, to 17 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s, to 35 per cent between 1980 and 1995. Taking the same time periods, grammar school-educated players rose from

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<sup>16</sup> Pullin, interview; Dudley Wood quoted in Collins, *Social History*, 201.

<sup>17</sup> Webb, interview.

29 per cent to 43 per cent, before falling to 21 per cent. Privately educated players made up 60 per cent of new caps in the earliest period, falling to 41 per cent in the 1960s and 1970s before rising slightly to 46 per cent in the more recent period.<sup>18</sup>

The conclusions drawn from these statistics once again demonstrate the importance of situating the sport within the context of wider society. On the surface, these figures show a significant swing to state schools across the period. Does this not indicate a great, democratising change in the sport's foundations? There was, undoubtedly, a level of change in this area, but it took place in the context of a changing education system. In 1965, a quarter of all public sector secondary school pupils attended grammar schools, while 65 per cent went to either secondary moderns (55 per cent) or comprehensives (10 per cent); twenty years later, only 3 per cent were at grammars, while just over 85 per cent attended comprehensives.<sup>19</sup> Given the extent of these changes, it is not so striking that the proportion of England players educated at non-selective state schools increased; what is particularly striking is that it did not increase by more. Furthermore, the dominance of private schools persisted across the period; in 1995, for example, with only 7 per cent of secondary pupils in private schools across England and Wales, 54 per cent of England's World Cup squad had been educated at such schools.<sup>20</sup>

While there was a degree of change, then, and the sport did experience a certain level of democratisation, it is the level of continuity in rugby union's link with selective and private education that emerges more prominently from this study. Not only were players educated at such schools consistently over-represented in the England team throughout the period, while players from non-selective state schools were consistently under-represented,

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<sup>18</sup> Appendix Two.

<sup>19</sup> Halsey and Webb, *Social Trends*, 199.

<sup>20</sup> Bolton, 'Education', 17; Appendix Two.



the experiences of those interviewed also reinforce the idea that rugby union remained, in essence, a grammar and private school sport. Grammars and private schools, in other words, were much more likely to be ‘rugby schools’ than were secondary moderns and comprehensives. Rugby union often lived a precarious existence at the latter types of school, relying on the presence of interested and committed members of staff (such as Nigel Horton’s Welsh, ex-rugby-playing head of PE at Wheeler’s Lane Secondary Modern or, indeed, Ray French, who as a teacher at Fairfield School, a secondary modern school in Widnes, set up a rugby union team for the sixth form pupils).<sup>21</sup> At grammar and private schools, on the other hand, the sport was an automatic and, as Peter Rossborough said of his school, ‘very important’ part of school life. As Malcolm Phillips put it of the direct grant school that he attended, ‘they sold themselves on their academic results, but they also sold themselves on their ability to play sport. Rugby was probably their main flagship.’<sup>22</sup>

Private and grammar schools were rugby union’s main recruitment tool in England – it was through playing at secondary school that many were introduced to the game for the first time. Thus the soccer-loving Rossborough ‘was soon disabused of [the] notion’ that he would carry on playing the round-ball sport once at King Henry VIII school in Coventry; John Pullin described being at grammar school as the ‘first he’d ever heard of’ rugby union; rugby league enthusiast Ray French found his first games lesson at Cowley School taught a ‘different’ form of rugby (this was ‘the first time he knew what [union] was’); and Tom Danby said of his school, the private Barnard Castle: ‘They played rugby – I’d never played rugby but I loved it.’<sup>23</sup> This happened at secondary moderns and comprehensives too. Gary Pearce encountered the sport for the first time at Mandeville

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<sup>21</sup> Horton, interview; French, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Rossborough, interview; Phillips, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Rossborough, interview; Pullin, interview; French, interview; Danby, interview.

County School (there had previously been ‘no interest in rugby whatsoever’ in his family), while Roger Uttley was introduced to the initially ‘strange game’ by his rugby-playing PE teacher at Montgomery Secondary Modern School.<sup>24</sup> Uttley, indeed, followed in his mentor’s footsteps by becoming a PE teacher himself – one of, as has been demonstrated, many top-level players who worked as teachers. Teaching was by far the most popular occupation among England players in the post-war era; a fact which was both indicative of, and served to reinforce, the deep bond between rugby union and education.

Higher education, too, played a part in this bond. Though its influence had waned by the 1990s and the importance of sport at universities declined in parallel with an increase in the professionalism of the club and international game, for much of this period university rugby was a significant force within the sport. The standing of Oxford and Cambridge was particularly high in the immediate post-war years, with the testimony of those who played there emphasising the importance of the Varsity match and the seriousness with which the sport was taken at each. Similarly, Colin McFadyean’s description of rugby union at Loughborough Colleges, as well as Ray French’s of Leeds University and Peter Rossborough’s of Durham, demonstrate the growing force of other universities within the sport in the expanding higher education sector of the 1960s and 1970s. For a large part of this period, universities counted senior clubs and touring international teams among their fixture lists, and in the earlier part of the period, it was commonplace to see players picked for England while still at university (particularly if they were at Oxford or Cambridge).

All of this points towards one of the main themes to emerge from this study – the especially strong tie between rugby union and education. As RFU president Tom Kemp

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<sup>24</sup> Pearce, interview; Uttley, interview.

put it in his address to the institution's annual general meeting in 1971, 'The foundations of our game are laid in the schools'.<sup>25</sup> The experiences of those interviewed reinforce the evidence from elsewhere that the sport largely retained its traditional connection to schools and, to a lesser extent, universities in post-war England. Schools were where most were introduced to, and learned, the sport, and where many of those playing as adults worked to teach the next generation what they had learnt. Along with universities, schools played a large part in the development of coaching in the sport, allowing as they did an acceptable environment in which the teaching of rugby, in an amateur era, could take place. Perhaps most importantly, though, rugby union continued to form a distinct part of the culture of certain types of school. Private and grammar schools saw rugby union as an indicator of status, attaching importance to the success of their teams and distinguishing themselves from other types of schools through their playing of the game. Ray French illustrated this divide particularly clearly when discussing why rugby league was not played at his grammar school in the league hotbed of St Helens:

The grammar schools all played rugby union. I think it was social snobbery, if you like. All the secondary modern schools played rugby league. If I had not passed the scholarship, I would have gone to a school called Parr Central, probably, which played rugby league ... I would never have known rugby union, really.<sup>26</sup>

Though more non-selective state schools did begin to take up the game, its power base still lay with private and grammar schools (the latter dwindling in influence thanks to their decline in numbers), who continued to play fixtures against each other while secondary moderns and comprehensives largely operated in a second tier. This, furthermore, remains the case today. Since the national under-18s Schools Cup began in

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<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 16 July 1971, London.

<sup>26</sup> French, interview.

the 1991-92 season, there have been twenty-seven finals; on twenty-two of those occasions, the cup has been won by a private school. Colston's School alone have won the competition seven times. The disproportionate influence of private schools is still clear to see.<sup>27</sup>

In a wider sense, rugby union's place within the education system in the post-war period serves as a reminder of the continued presence of stratification and hierarchy within that system. While the post-Butler structure of secondary schooling failed to achieve the greater levels of social mobility it was intended to bring about, the continued presence of private secondary education and its continued influence on society ensured inequality remained built into the system. Rugby union was the sporting incarnation of all of this; a part, as Adrian Smith has observed, of 'the social divide forged by pre-adolescence selection and/or middle-class parental choice'.<sup>28</sup> Created, as it was, in the public schools of Victorian England, and having become entrenched in private and grammar schools following the 'rush to rugby' between the wars, the sport was a distinctive badge worn by such schools which helped to denote their status within the nation's educational hierarchy. Though this trend became slightly less pronounced as a greater amount of state schools began to play the sport and grammar schools fell sharply in number, achievement within English rugby union in the post-war period largely continued to be reserved for those who had been to private and grammar schools. Rugby union in England was, in conclusion, an

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<sup>27</sup> 'Natwest Schools Cup and Vase: Competition Archive', *School Sports*, accessed 23 August 2017, <http://www.schoolssports.com/CompetitionMicrosite/Archive.asp?TID=NatWest-Schools-Cup>. Of the other five finals, two were won by comprehensive schools, two were won by tertiary colleges and one was won by a grammar school.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, 'Rugby's Twin Codes', 102.

illustrative part of an unequal education system – a brick in ‘education’s Berlin wall’ – and there was little in the way of meaningful change in this by 1995.<sup>29</sup>

The same can be said of rugby union’s relationship with work. In terms of the jobs that top-level players did, there were subtle changes – an increase, for example, in the number of players working in finance in the second half of the period – but the broader trend was one of continuity. Rugby union players continued overwhelmingly to hold non-manual, middle-class occupations – just as had been the case before the war. To make a few indicative selections from Tony Collins’ figures relating to England international players, between 1946 and 1995 there were eight bankers, twelve doctors, twelve managers, thirteen solicitors, thirty-four salesmen, thirty-six company directors and eighty-four teachers. Teachers alone accounted for very nearly a quarter of all players. By contrast, manual, working-class jobs are conspicuous by their absence. There were fifteen farmers – a manual occupation but by no means necessarily a working-class one – and otherwise just a handful of examples. Only around 5 per cent of players could be said definitively to have had working-class, manual jobs – the vast majority of which, furthermore, appear to have been skilled or semi-skilled occupations.<sup>30</sup>

The interview evidence from this study does little to challenge the picture painted by these statistics, and much to support it. Those interviewed overwhelmingly had middle-class jobs themselves, but more importantly, the majority add weight to the statistical evidence above with their descriptions of the types of jobs their teammates held. Perhaps the only exception to this was the testimony of Phil Judd, who recalled a miner, toolmaker,

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<sup>29</sup> The quoted phrase here refers to the title of the following article: David Kynaston and George Kynaston, ‘Education’s Berlin Wall: The Private Schools Conundrum’, *New Statesman*, 2 March 2017, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/01/education-private-schools-berlin-wall>.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 216–18.

factory worker and plumber among the Coventry forward pack he played in, as well as the more general idea that ‘you didn’t get many professional people playing the game in Coventry’.<sup>31</sup> Coventry, though, was an outlier; a rare section of England in which working-class rugby union had flourished and survived. Even there, furthermore, grammar and private school influence was present, and many players did not come from the factories but from staff rooms and offices. Across English rugby union as a whole, much more common were the types of jobs remembered by Rory Underwood (‘insurance ... salesman ... copper ... architect’) or John Mallett (‘sports teachers ... a doctor, a farmer, a lawyer’).<sup>32</sup>

A common observation made by interviewees was that amateur rugby union players did a variety of jobs (‘an incredible mix’, as John Mallett put it, or ‘a wide variety of careers’ as Gary Pearce said). There can be no doubt that this is true, though there is perhaps an implication in such observations that this range of jobs stretched across class boundaries and that players therefore came from, as Pearce stated, ‘all walks of life’. This is an example of what has been referred to by this study as rugby union’s ‘self-image’ – the idea that it is a sport with ‘no class distinction whatsoever’, to return to Bill Beaumont’s modern-day assertion.<sup>33</sup> Pearce’s statement, and others like it, may have been true of certain individual teams, but as a whole it is clear that, in fact, rugby union players generally did a wide variety of *middle-class* jobs. There was, interestingly, some evidence that interviewees recognised this broader picture. Peter Winterbottom said of the 1980s and 1990s that ‘there weren’t many sort of labourers, or [people] doing unskilled jobs’, and Malcolm Phillips said that in the England team of the late 1950s and early 1960s, ‘there was a predominance – but not overwhelmingly – of middle class [people] ... Business executive types, teachers,

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<sup>31</sup> Judd, interview.

<sup>32</sup> Underwood, interview; Mallett, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Mallett, interview; Pearce, interview; Kitson, ‘Chasing the Chariot’.

professionals'.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise, though, the default mode of most ex-players was to return to the aforementioned self-image, likely because of a mixture of personal, anecdotal evidence and a desire to paint their sport in a favourable light. Even Malcolm Phillips in the example above was reluctant to depart from this image, qualifying his statement with the words 'but not overwhelmingly', and pointing out immediately afterwards that there was no sense of any social division among the players themselves.<sup>35</sup>

If this self-image is indicative of a cohesive 'fraternity of rugby', so too is the idea, strongly suggested by the evidence from this study, that rugby union highlights the continued anti-meritocratic power of social networks in post-war England. The sport is a working example of Pierre Bourdieu's idea of social capital; of the 'profits which accrue from membership in a group'.<sup>36</sup> This is illustrated by the role it played in helping players to gain entry to higher education, and most particularly by the way in which it helped them to obtain jobs (as well as to be successful in them). The stories told by interviewees on these subjects reinforce the prevailing concept of a 'Freemasonry of rugby'. Whether it is Ted Woodward being offered a scholarship at St Mary's Hospital, Ray French going to Leeds University 'basically to play second row', Victor Ubogu heading to Oxford University 'to get a Blue', Peter Winterbottom moving from a Yorkshire farm to a City dealing room or even Peter Ford receiving a shipment of oranges early, the idea, as Tony Collins puts it, that 'rugby was the passport that demonstrated one's bona fides for entry to and progress within the appropriate social networks' is borne out in the experiences of those interviewed for this study.<sup>37</sup> The examples of rugby union players on national service, as described in

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<sup>34</sup> Winterbottom, interview; Phillips, interview.

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, interview.

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, 'Forms of Capital', 89.

<sup>37</sup> Woodward, interview; French, interview; Ubogu, interview; Winterbottom, interview; Ford, interview; Collins, *Social History*, 107.

the second chapter, serve to further highlight this phenomenon. In a broader sense, this contributes to our understanding of the forces acting against the increasingly influential idea of meritocracy in post-war Britain. The experiences of top-level rugby union players are a reminder that some people were able to, as Harold Perkin put it, ‘acquire merit more easily than others’ – that despite the fact that entry to higher education, work and positions of authority was increasingly governed by qualifications and the quality of an individual’s CV, there were still shortcuts to be taken within certain networks.<sup>38</sup>

Perkin, indeed, talked of the ‘social fabric’ of England being made up of the vertical ‘warp of professional career hierarchies’ and the ‘horizontal weft of class’. ‘Class and hierarchy’, he believed of twentieth-century England, ‘are an integral part of the fabric and neither ever quite disappears from view’.<sup>39</sup> This, as has been clear throughout this thesis, was true of English rugby union. Class is an often difficult topic to define – as Arthur Marwick has observed, ‘For class, there are no membership or voting figures as there are for political parties, no membership or attendance figures as there are for religious denominations, no basic demographic details as there are for ethnic groups.’<sup>40</sup> Whichever way English rugby union and its players are looked at, however, the picture that emerges clearly is that of a middle-class sport.

To take the standard, ‘objective’ measures of class, this is true of the educational backgrounds of the majority of England players (and the sport’s ties to education in general), and it is true of their occupational backgrounds. It is also true of other, more nebulous aspects of the sport. Rugby union’s amateurism, for example, was rooted in its class background and its cherished identity as the true form of rugby football. Its fervent

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<sup>38</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Marwick, ‘Class’, 76.



opposition to rugby league represented a dichotomous class model – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – and the lack of challenge to amateurism for a large part of the post-war period was an indicator of the sport’s middle-class composition. When amateurism was challenged, furthermore, it did not happen because of any significant change in the sport’s class composition. Instead, it came alongside a shift in middle-class attitudes to work and money which began to make amateurism look outmoded and unfair.

Other aspects of the sport’s culture, as described by interviewees, were also middle-class in nature. The post-match dinner, for example – an event with roots in historical concepts of middle-class male sociability – remained a fixture of England international matches throughout the period. The importance and tradition of the occasion come through clearly from the interview evidence; from Budge Rogers, as chairman of selectors, refusing to accept a request from the England team to sit together, to David Caplan being reminded ahead of his first cap of the importance of remembering his dinner jacket.<sup>41</sup> Events like these were an example of how the sport could act as a means of middle-class socialisation (especially for those few players who came to it from outside the ranks of the middle classes). Ray French, for example, had ‘never seen a lobster on a plate in [his] life’ before finding one sitting in front of him at a pre-England trial dinner, while Budge Rogers talked of the ‘social abilities’ the sport gave him (and, staying with the seafood theme, remembered being introduced to whitebait for the first time by an England teammate). Similarly, Peter Ford talked of rugby as ‘a big education; going to places, going into hotels, travelling to places.’ He had never set foot in a hotel before doing so on an away trip with his club Gloucester, and had never held a passport before obtaining one for England’s visit to France in 1964. Ted Woodward, too, viewed the sport in this way, saying: ‘It makes you

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<sup>41</sup> Rogers, interview; Caplan, interview.

... a little bit more confident in yourself ... You can go into a room and you can talk to anybody, doesn't matter who they are – whether it's the chap who is sweeping the streets or the chap who's a prime minister.' Coming to the sport as the son of a butcher who lived in a council house, he believed that being involved in rugby union opened up a new world to him; 'Because otherwise ... being in the butcher's shop, you've got a very close-knit community, as it were, and you didn't go anywhere, or didn't do anything.' One particularly apt phrase from Colin McFadyean provides the perfect summary of all this: 'I had never drunk gin and tonic till I played for England.'<sup>42</sup>

Was there any hint of change in English rugby union's class profile throughout this period? Perkin wrote that 'in late twentieth-century Britain ... the warp of professionalism [was] beginning to show through and overlay the weft of class', and there were some outward signs that as rugby union moved closer to professionalism, its own class boundaries were beginning to blur.<sup>43</sup> There were, as discussed, some signs of democratisation in the sport's representation in schools, and in the educational background of England players. Further to this, the sport's growing media profile gave it, and its stars, greater exposure than they had previously experienced. Players recalled the 1991 World Cup, for example, as helping to spread interest in the sport outside its traditional middle-class audience. To a certain extent, rugby was caught up in the trend towards what Alwyn Turner has referred to as the 'classless culture' of 1990s Britain.<sup>44</sup>

Any changes that were evident, however, took place within the confines of the sport's long-established middle-class framework. By 1995, though there were more state-educated players to be found in the sport, around half the England team was still drawn

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<sup>42</sup> French, interview; Rogers, interview; Ford, interview; Woodward, interview; McFadyean, interview.

<sup>43</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Turner, *A Classless Society*, 6.

from private schools. Though more people watched the game on television than had done in the past, many of them were from the sections of society that rugby union had always been part of. And though the England team were now allowed to sit together, and even invite their wives, formal post-match dinners were still part of an international matchday (and, as photographer Jon Nicholson found out when he was handed a pint of it while shooting for a behind-the-scenes chronicle of the England squad in the 1995-96 season, they still drank gin and tonic).<sup>45</sup> Writing at the turn of the millennium, Arthur Marwick suggested that ‘in the Britain of 2000, as in all advanced societies, the ambiguous and the non-traditional were everywhere apparent, but so too were many remaining perceptions, and, indeed, realities, of class.’<sup>46</sup> He could very easily have been writing about English rugby union.

The class-related changes that rugby union does highlight are those that took place within the middle classes. The initial shift, for example, in the educational backgrounds of England players towards grammar schools reflected the increase in the numbers of middle-class children attending such schools following the Butler Act. In relation to work – as Collins, using McKibbin as his guide, has pointed out – England players’ jobs reflected a twentieth-century shift in middle-class work away from traditional, pre-industrial professions (‘the church, the law, medicine, or the armed forces’) and towards technical and, increasingly as the century progressed, commercial occupations.<sup>47</sup> It is clear from both Collins’ statistics and from the evidence produced by this study that the most common jobs in the second half of the twentieth century were not the traditional professions mentioned above. Jonathan Webb (a surgeon) and Rory Underwood (an RAF pilot), for

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<sup>45</sup> Frank Keating, *Band of Brothers: A Celebration of the England Rugby Union Squad* (London: Michael Joseph, 1996), 81.

<sup>46</sup> Marwick, ‘Class’, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Collins, *Social History*, 105; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 46.

example, stood out as unusual cases in the England squads of the late 1980s and early 1990s. More common, by that stage, were City workers like Simon Halliday and Peter Winterbottom, surveyors like Gary Pearce, Chris Oti and Rob Andrew, and consultants of various forms, such as Will Carling, Richard Hill and Mickey Skinner.<sup>48</sup> Rugby union's shift away from amateurism and towards professionalism also mirrored a similar shift in the nature of middle-class work. Prior to the 1970s, as Gunn and Bell have observed, 'it was essential not to appear "pushy" or striving, not to be seen to be trying too hard' in professional work.<sup>49</sup> In the second half of the period studied here, however, this began to change – performance, hours spent in the office and results all mattered much more in the world of work than they used to. This attitudinal change was mirrored on the rugby pitch. Where 'not to be seen to be trying too hard' had previously been something of an amateur mantra, an increased importance placed on winning matches meant extra training sessions, more advanced coaching and fitness performance benchmarks all became an accepted part of the sport. If you wanted to succeed, you had to earn it. Furthermore, if you did succeed, rugby union, like broader English middle-class society, began to embrace the idea that you should enjoy the monetary fruits of your achievements – an increasingly pervasive attitude summed up by Jonathan Webb's remark: 'if I'm playing this much and committing this much it would be nice to be paid.'<sup>50</sup>

In *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain*, Anthony Seldon writes that 'Britain changed more in the fifty years from 1945 to 1995 than in any other fifty-year period'. Adonis and Pollard, writing a year later in *A Class Act*, believed Seldon's statement to be 'the conceit of modernity'. 'In truth', they said, 'modern Britain is as much the product of

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<sup>48</sup> Spink, *The Rugby Union Who's Who 1991/92*.

<sup>49</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> Webb, interview.

social continuity as it is of social change'.<sup>51</sup> Which of these two arguments is correct, or indeed closest to the truth? While this study cannot provide, and does not aim to provide, a definitive answer to such an all-encompassing question, it does provide further evidence with which to help arrive at an assessment of change and continuity in the post-war period. English rugby union itself remained, for the most part, a conservative, traditional sport. While it quite clearly experienced change between 1945 and 1995, it often did so reluctantly, and within historical limitations. The experiences of its players paint a picture of a section of society comfortable within the status quo, and often protective of it. As incoming president Tom Kemp proudly put it in the RFU's centenary year, 'Rugby football has evolved only slowly from its first beginnings at Rugby School; it has a strong belief in tradition and is essentially conservative.'<sup>52</sup> Rugby union, therefore, while offering us evidence of change, demonstrates most strongly the power of social *continuity* in post-war England: continued inequality within education, the continued influence of class, the continued limitations of social mobility, the continuing anti-meritocratic power of networks. It is common to speak of sports history as using its subjects as a 'prism' through which to see society – these, in conclusion, are the things we see when the prism of this particular sport is held up to the light.

This study contributes, therefore, a particular perspective to both to the historiography of sport in post-war England and also to that of the period more generally. With regards to sport, Mike Cronin has observed that 'the middle classes ... have been a central theme in much recent sports history work'.<sup>53</sup> A lot of this work, however – such as that listed by Cronin in support of this point – focuses on periods prior to the Second

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<sup>51</sup> Seldon, 'Ideas Are Not Enough', 257; Adonis and Pollard, *Class Act*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the RFU AGM, 16 July 1971, London.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Cronin, 'What Went Wrong with Counting? Thinking about Sport and Class in Britain and Ireland', *Sport in History* 29, no. 3 (2009): 392.

World War.<sup>54</sup> This research, therefore, contributes a study with a specifically post-war focus, tackling not the idea of the role of the middle classes in establishing sport in Britain but that of their continued role in sustaining it in a changing context. While works such as Martin Polley's *Moving the Goalposts* and Holt and Mason's *Sport in Britain* have charted the changes in British sport across the post-war period – the ways in which, looking from the late 1990s, sport was 'unrecognisable ... from its condition in the mid-1940s' – this study primarily seeks to emphasise, and add weight to, Polley's balancing contention that 'there has been a great deal of continuity' in post-war sport.<sup>55</sup> While 'professionalisation and social mobility ... altered the class appearance of sport' in some senses, this thesis contributes a counter-example to the wider narrative of social change in post-war British sport, demonstrating continuity in the social and attitudinal make-up of English rugby union even among the wave of commercialism and professionalisation affecting sport in general.<sup>56</sup> Holt and Mason note that 'although specific sports retained a distinct social profile', commercialism and consumption had, by end of the twentieth century, had a democratising effect on British sport.<sup>57</sup> This study offers an example of the power of Holt and Mason's initial qualification; the extent to which a sport could retain its social profile among such wider changes. Rugby union, this thesis shows, had a remarkably unchanging inner social core.

Similarly, by focusing on the experiences of a section of the population, rather than political or institutional changes as viewed from the outside, this thesis helps to challenge the notion that the post-war period was one simply of change, especially in terms of social structure. Many historians of the period, such as Seldon (as noted above) and Paul

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>55</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 161; Ibid., 162.

<sup>56</sup> Polley, *Moving the Goalposts*, 161–62.

<sup>57</sup> Holt and Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 176.

Addison, have chosen to emphasise above all the ‘revolutions’ and ‘paradigm shifts’ of the post-war period.<sup>58</sup> While there is undoubtedly a great deal of change to be explored in this time, this study contributes to the work of those, such as David Kynaston and Dominic Sandbrook, who have countered notions of unparalleled change through work which focuses more on the lived experiences of Britons and the durability of social structures. In particular, this thesis provides a unique window into the lives of middle-class men in post-war Britain, constructed around a focal point – rugby union – which reflected many of the attitudes developed by that group over time. It is a demonstration of David Cannadine’s observation that, while Britons have conceived, and continue to conceive, of class in different ways, it is the ‘enduringness’ of class as a model through which to see society that is most striking about British society.<sup>59</sup> The historiography of the middle classes in England lacks both reference to sport as an illustrative part of middle-class life and focus on the post-war period specifically. This study, it is hoped, will help to fill these gaps and perhaps to provide challenges, too, to existing theories. Gunn and Bell, for example, observed that ‘the concept of the middle classes becomes meaningless when the institutions, way of life and values which defined the group no longer pertain,’ and that, by the end of the twentieth century, the concept of the middle classes lacked ‘a substantive social ... or cultural referent.’<sup>60</sup> This thesis demonstrates that, in fact, certain middle-class institutions, ways of life and values did pertain, and that such referents perhaps did, and do, exist.

This research has highlighted several areas that would benefit from further study. To begin with the specific subject matter of this thesis, two worthwhile extensions are immediately apparent. The first is to extend the research beyond 1995 and into the

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<sup>58</sup> Addison, *No Turning Back*, 403.

<sup>59</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 170.

<sup>60</sup> Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, 228–29.

professional era. Rugby union has now been professional for over twenty years – sufficient time, perhaps, to investigate the effects professionalism has had on the social foundations of the sport. Can the above conclusions also be made of the sport in 2017? Or has professionalism, now embedded within the sport, altered its culture and modified its place in society? A second worthwhile extension to this study would be to widen its geographical reach to the other three ‘home nations’ – Ireland, Scotland and Wales – and investigate the extent to which the identified trends were present across the British Isles, or whether the experiences of players in these other countries differed substantially from those of their English counterparts. It is commonly believed, for example, that rugby union in Ireland and Scotland had similar social foundations to the sport in England, whereas in Wales it was (and is) more cross-class. Does an oral history study of the sport in those countries confirm this, or challenge it? How, if at all, did attitudes differ on issues such as amateurism and professionalism? In what sense was ‘British’ rugby union united, and in what sense divided – and how does this tie in with wider national trends and identities in a post-war period marked by political movements towards devolution?

The creation of an oral history archive as a means of providing a snapshot of a certain sport in a certain time has proved a fruitful means of research. As suggested in the introductory chapter, though, it is a method that has been surprisingly underused to date. Further concerted oral history work – rooted, crucially, in wider historical analysis – would be of benefit to both our understanding of the histories of individual sports, and, through comparison, to our understanding of the history of sport in general. How, for example, would the experiences of professional rugby league players or professional footballers in this same period compare to those of amateur rugby union players? Was rugby union’s amateur approach solely down to its own historical, class-driven attachment to the ideal of



amateurism, or do the experiences of other sportspeople in this era show a more general lack of progress towards a 'professional outlook' in British sport? Did top-level amateur track and field athletes do the same types of jobs as rugby union players, and experience similar interactions between work and sport? Do the experiences of those who played cricket, the major summer sport of private and grammar schools, reveal a similarly deep bond between sport and education? While the ever-increasing body of research on British sports history can already go some way to answering such questions as these, we are currently lacking a vitally important body of evidence – the voices of those who played, properly analysed and situated in a historical context.

There is scope also for further work of this type in other areas of post-war social history. With regards to education, further work is necessary on the changing educational landscape of post-war Britain which, for such an influential area of society, appears to lack concerted study by social historians. A social history of education in post-war Britain, highlighted through oral history by the voices and experiences of pupils and teachers, for example, would surely contribute much not just to our understanding of the social effects of educational policy (how did it feel, for example, to be a working-class child in a grammar school?) but to the social history of the period in general. This study has also touched on the changing nature of work in post-war Britain – largely in the sense of middle-class, office work. Here too is an area that would benefit from further study, given its rise in the post-war period and influence on the lives of a growing section of the population. This is an area that warrants a more overarching view than currently exists, in order to properly assess the ways in which it evolved and the influence it had on society.

This thesis, to sum up finally, began by commenting on the importance of sport to modern societies and the necessity, though regular absence, of its place in social

historiography of Britain. Above all, this study has aimed to contribute to the continuing effort to give sport its proper place in the study of history; to regard it not as a separate sphere, a frivolity not worthy of a place among the sterner stuff of ‘serious’ history, but as a vital part of the life of a nation. Sport is woven, as this study has sought to demonstrate, into the fabric of society. Histories of society should consider it as such, as should histories of sport. In J.B. Priestley’s *The Good Companions*, he comments on a football crowd, writing: ‘To say that these men paid their shillings to watch twenty-two hirelings kick a ball is merely to say that a violin is wood and catgut, that *Hamlet* is so much paper and ink.’<sup>61</sup> In other words, if sport matters to so many people’s lives, its importance should not be ignored or downplayed. Rugby union, this study teaches us above all, mattered to people’s lives. The words of one interviewee, Roger Uttley, seem particularly apt to finish on: ‘Everything I’ve got today I would put down, basically, to my involvement in rugby football. I can’t think of anything that’s not connected, really.’<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> J.B. Priestley, *The Good Companions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1929]), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Uttley, interview.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: List of interviewees

Name	Years capped	Number of caps	Clubs*	Education**	Occupation***
Micky Steele-Bodger	1947-48	9	Cambridge University, Edinburgh University	Rugby School (P); Cambridge University, Edinburgh University	Veterinary surgeon
Tom Danby	1949	1	Harlequins	Barnard Castle School (P); St John's College, York	Teacher
Chris Winn	1952-54	8	Rosslyn Park	King's College School, Wimbledon (P); Oxford University	Chemicals salesman; insurance broker
Ted Woodward	1952-56	15	Wasps	Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe (G)	Butcher; sports shop owner
John Collins	1952	3	Camborne	Basset Road Secondary Modern School (S)	Draughtsman
Ian Beer	1955	2	Harlequins	Whitgift School (P); Cambridge University	Teacher
Mike Smith	1956	1	Oxford University	Stamford School (P); Oxford University	Assistant secretary at Warwickshire County Cricket Club
Malcolm Phillips	1958-64	25	Oxford University, Fylde	Arnold School (DG); Oxford University	Engineering firm employee; paint manufacturer employee
John Young	1958-61	9	Oxford University, Harlequins	Bishop Vesey's Grammar School (G); Oxford University	Stockbroker; investment executive
Don Rutherford	1960-67	14	Percy Park, Gloucester	Tynemouth High School (G); St Luke's College, Exeter	Teacher
Richard Sharp	1960-67	14	Oxford University, Wasps, Bristol	Blundell's School (P); Oxford University	Teacher

Ray French	1961	4	Leeds University, St Helens	Cowley School (G); Leeds University	Teacher
Budge Rogers	1961-69	34	Bedford	Bedford School (P); Northampton College of Advanced Technology	Engineering firm employee; insurance broker; management consultant
Phil Judd	1962-67	22	Coventry	Broad Street School (S)	Pattern maker; engineering firm owner
Peter Ford	1964	4	Gloucester	Central Modern School (S)	Wholesale fruit firm owner
John Pullin	1966-76	42	Bristol	Thornbury Grammar School (G); Cirencester Agricultural College	Farmer
Colin McFadyean	1966-68	11	Moseley	Plymouth College (DG), Bristol Grammar School (DG); Loughborough Colleges	Teacher
David Duckham	1969-76	36	Coventry	King Henry VIII School (DG)	Bank branch employee; construction firm salesman
Nigel Horton	1969-80	20	Moseley, Toulouse	Wheeler's Lane Secondary Modern School (S)	Policeman; bar owner
Peter Rossborough	1971-75	7	Coventry	King Henry VIII School (DG); Durham University	Teacher
Alan Old	1972-78	16	Middlesbrough, Leicester, Sheffield	Acklam Hall Grammar School (G); London University, Durham University	Teacher
Roger Uttley	1973-80	23	Gosforth, Wasps	Montgomery Secondary School (S), Blackpool Grammar School (G); Northumberland College	Teacher; health business owner

David Caplan	1978	2	Headingley	Leeds Grammar School (DG); Newcastle University	Dentist
Gary Pearce	1979-91	36	Northampton	Mandeville County School (S); South Bank Polytechnic	Quantity surveyor
Peter Winterbottom	1982-93	58	Headingley, Harlequins	Rossall School (P); Seale-Hayne Agricultural College	Farmer; Eurobond trader
Rory Underwood	1984-96	85	Leicester	Barnard Castle School (P)	RAF officer
Jonathan Webb	1987-93	33	Bristol, Bath	Royal Grammar School, Newcastle (DG)†; Bristol University	Surgeon
Tim Rodber	1992-99	44	Northampton	Churcher's College (P); Oxford Polytechnic	Army officer; marketing business owner
Victor Ubogu	1992-99	24	Bath	West Buckland College (P); Birmingham University, Oxford University	Property firm employee; bar owner
John Mallett	1995	1	Bath	Millfield School (P)	Leisure firm employee; teacher

\* For the sake of brevity, the clubs listed are those for which the individual was playing when he was capped for England.

\*\* (P) denotes private school, (DG) denotes direct grant school, (G) denotes grammar school and (S) denotes non-selective state school.

\*\*\* The occupations listed are those the individual held during his rugby union playing career.

† The school transferred to independent status during Webb's time there.

## Sources

Interviews; Stuart Farmer et al., *English Rugby Player by Player* (Swindon: Marks and Spencer, 2007).

## Appendix Two: Secondary schools of England internationals

Number of England debutants who attended each of the three types of school, expressed also as a percentage of the total known players for that period:

Years	Non-selective state	Grammar	Private	Unknown	Total players*
1947-50	6 (11%)	11 (20%)	37 (69%)	4	58
1951-55	6 (14%)	15 (35%)	22 (51%)	5	48
1956-60	2 (6%)	12 (36%)	19 (58%)	1	34
1961-65	3 (7%)	17 (40%)	22 (52%)	1	43
1966-70	12 (24%)	20 (39%)	20 (39%)	3	54
1971-75	8 (18%)	19 (42%)	18 (40%)	1	46
1976-80	5 (19%)	13 (48%)	9 (33%)	0	27
1981-85	15 (33%)	13 (28%)	20 (43%)	2	48
1986-90	12 (40%)	7 (23%)	11 (37%)	1	31
1991-95	7 (39%)	0 (0%)	11 (61%)	0	18
Total	76 (20%)	127 (33%)	189 (49%)	18	407

\* Where this figure is lower than the total of the preceding figures in the row, it indicates that certain players attended two different types of secondary school. This is the case for one player in 1966-70 and two players in 1981-85.

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**Appendix Three: Interview documents**

Each prospective interviewee was sent a personal letter or email introducing and describing the project, along with an information sheet containing further details about it. Once an interviewee had agreed to take part, they were sent a recording agreement, and a withdrawal form containing confidentiality details. These were further explained, and completed where relevant, after the interview had taken place.

This process, and these documents, were approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at De Montfort University prior to the research being carried out. The information sheet, recording agreement and withdrawal form are reproduced on the following pages.



## Information sheet



An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995

### INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION SHEET

#### What we are doing

The International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, in conjunction with the Rugby Football Union's World Rugby Museum, is researching the history of England international rugby union players in the post-war amateur era. The working title of the project is 'An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995'. It will examine the experiences of England internationals both by looking at their careers as players and by considering the sport's interaction with their lives off the pitch.

#### Who we are

The primary researcher is Joe Hall, a postgraduate student at the International Centre for Sports History and Culture. His supervisor is Professor Tony Collins, one of the world's leading rugby historians and Professor of History at De Montfort University. The project is being funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Rugby Football Union.

#### The interview

We are seeking to interview former rugby union players who played for England between the years of 1945 and 1995. Interviews will be recorded on a microphone, and are expected to last between 90 minutes and two hours (but may be longer or shorter depending on the wishes of the interviewee and the progress of the interview).

Here are some example topics we will hope to cover in the interview:

- Your early life and background
- Your first experiences of rugby union
- Your club career and England career
- Your match-day and training experiences
- The impact of being an England international on your life
- Your career away from rugby and life after retirement from the game

#### How your participation will help

By participating, you will be contributing your valuable knowledge to an important area of the sporting and social history of Britain. In doing so, you will help to both enrich the heritage of English rugby union, and to present to the public a unique new story of the modern amateur game – one told by the players themselves.

#### How the interview will be used

The recorded interview will be used for research purposes by Mr Hall, who aims to publish a PhD thesis on the topic. The thesis will examine the areas outlined above, as well as looking at rugby's place within English society. The interview will also be placed in an archive at both De Montfort University and the World Rugby Museum, Twickenham.

## Recording agreement



### An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995

#### ORAL HISTORY RECORDING AGREEMENT

Your recorded interview will become part of the International Centre for Sports History and Culture's 'An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995' project, where it will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet. Your recorded interview may also be requested for use by the Rugby Football Union's World Rugby Museum; should this be the case you will be contacted for further consent before this can happen. The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure that your contribution is added to the archives of the ICSHC in strict accordance with your wishes.

This Agreement is made between **De Montfort University of The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH** ("the University") and **you** ("the Interviewee", "I"):

Your Name:

Your Address:

In regard to the recorded interview/s that took place on the following date/s:

**Declaration:** I, the Interviewee confirm that I consented to take part in the recording and hereby assign to the University all copyright in my contribution for use in all and any media. I understand that this will not affect my moral right to be identified as the 'performer' in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

*If you do not wish to assign your copyright to the University, or you wish to limit public access to your contribution for a period of years, please state these conditions here:*

This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with English law and the jurisdiction of the English courts.

Both parties shall, by signing below, indicate acceptance of the Agreement.

	By or on behalf of <b>the Interviewee:</b>	On behalf of <b>the University:</b>
Signed:		
Print Name:		
Date:		

## Confidentiality details and withdrawal form



An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995

## CONFIDENTIALITY DETAILS AND WITHDRAWAL FORM

### Confidentiality:

Your recorded interview will become part of the International Centre for Sports History and Culture's 'An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995' archive, where it will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet. Your recorded interview will also be archived at the Rugby Football Union's World Rugby Museum, where it may be used for display, research and other purposes – including potential use in broadcasts and on the internet. The Museum will, wherever possible, contact you before the material is used in this way. You will only be identified in recordings and publications by your first name and your surname, unless you specify otherwise on the Oral History Recording Agreement. Any reference to geographic places in relation to your contribution will be kept to general place names, such as 'Leicester' or 'Coventry'. All data relating to your specific contact details will be kept strictly confidential within the ICSHC and only be accessible to Mr Joe Hall and Professor Tony Collins. Such data will be kept for a maximum of five years after the completion of the project, after which time it will be destroyed.

### Your right to withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw your interview from the archive at any point, by returning the form overleaf to the following address:

Professor Tony Collins  
 International Centre for Sports History and Culture  
 De Montfort University  
 The Gateway  
 LEICESTER  
 LE1 9BH



I hereby wish to withdraw my consent for my interview to be included in the 'Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945-1995' archive with immediate consent:

Name:	
Address:	
Signature:	
Date:	

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